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# Fantasy

READER No.15

A MAN, A MAID, and SATURN'S  
TEMPTATION — Stanley G. Weinbaum

also stories by

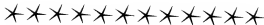
P. Schuyler Miller

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Miles J. Breuer

AND OTHERS





## *What Strange Price Would She Pay for Those Magic Jewels?*

Those fabulous flame-orchids would guarantee to any daring girl a life of luxury and wealth—and Diane Vick had found them. But, though the universe's most jealously sought jewels were in her hand, between Diane and Earth's luxury cities lay a vast land of unspeakable terror—the world of Titan, moon of Saturn. Stanley G. Weinbaum's vivid story of *A MAN, A MAID, AND SATURN'S TEMPTATION* is an unforgettable picture of an alien world, a bold adventuress, and a race of beings sunk in a morass of hypnotic decadence.

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FANTASY READER

No. 13

Edited by

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*Stories by*

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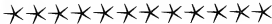
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# *A Man, a Maid, and Saturn's Temptation*

by Stanley G. Weinbaum

*When Stanley G. Weinbaum died, science-fiction lost one of its most unusual imaginations, one that had in a short span boosted the art of the interplanetary story high by its Dunsenian visualization. A young Milwaukee man, his success was meteoric from the moment his first effort, "A Martian Odyssey," appeared unheralded in print. His uncanny ability to invent other-earthly flora and fauna—and keep them both non-terrestrial and convincing—was endlessly fertile . . . though Weinbaum always endeavored to stick to the known astronomical facts about each alien world. Many of his stories have since been reprinted in books and anthologies, but the present one, originally entitled, "Flight on Titan," has thus far not appeared—though we understand it will be included in Fantasy Press's next Weinbaum short story collection.*

THE GALE roared incessantly like all the tormented souls since creation's dawn, driving the two sliding and tumbling into the momentary shelter of a ridge of ice. A cloud of glittering ice needles swept by, rainbow-hued in the brilliant night, and the chill of eighty below zero bit through the sponge rubber of their suits.

The girl placed her visor close against the man's helmet and said steadily: "This is the end, isn't it, Tim? Because I'm glad I came with you, then. I'm glad it's both of us together."

The man groaned despairingly, and the blast tore the sound away. He turned aside, thinking regretfully of the past.

The year 2142, as most people recall, was a disastrous one in the financial world. It was the year of the collapse of the Planetary Trading Corporation and the year that ushered in the resultant depression.

Most of us remember the hysterical two years of speculation that preceded the crash. These followed the final development of the Hocken Rocket in 2030, the annexation of the arid and useless Moon by Russia, and the discovery by the international expeditions of a dead civilization on Mars and a primitive one on Venus. It was the Venus report that led to the formation of the P. T. C. and the debacle that followed.

No one knows now who was to blame. All the members of those intrepid expeditions have suffered under the cloud; two of them were murdered in Paris only a little more than a year ago, presumably by vengeful investors in

Planetary. Gold will do such things to men; they will take mad risks with what they have, pursuing a vision of what they hope to have, and, when the crash comes, turn on any scapegoat that's luckless enough to be handy.

At any rate, regardless of responsibility, the rumor started that gold was as common on Venus as iron on Earth—and then the damage was done. No one stopped to reflect that the planet's density is less than the Earth's, and that gold, or any heavy metal, should be even rare there, it not utterly absent, as on the Moon.

The rumors spread like an epidemic, and stories circulated that the expedition members had returned wealthy. All one had to do, it seemed, was to trade beads and jackknives to the obliging Venusian natives for golden cups, golden axes, golden ornaments.

The shares of the quickly organized Planetary Trading Corporation skyrocketed from a par of fifty to a peak of thirteen hundred. Vast paper fortunes were made; the civilized world went into a frenzy of speculative fever; prices of everything shot upward in anticipation of a flood of new gold—food, rent, clothing, machinery.

We all remember the outcome. Planetary's first two trading expeditions looked long and arduously for the gold. They found the natives; they found them eager enough for beads and jackknives, but they found them quite destitute of gold. They brought back neat little carvings and a quantity of silver, scientifically valuable records, and a handful of pearl-like stones from Venusian seas—but no gold. Nothing to pay dividends to the avid stockholders; nothing to support the rumor-puffed structure of prices, which crashed as quickly as the shares of Planetary, once the truth was out.

The collapse affected investors and noninvestors alike, and among them Timothy Vick and his Canadian wife Diane. The spring of 2142 found them staring at each other in their New York apartment, all but penniless, and in the very depths of despair. Jobs were vanishing, and Tim's training as a salesman of home vision sets was utterly useless in a world where nobody could afford to buy them. So they sat and stared hopelessly, and said very little.

Tim at last broke the gloomy silence. "Di," he said, "what'll we do when it's all gone?"

"Our money? Tim, something will come before then. It has to!"

"But if it doesn't?" At her silence, he continued: "I'm not going to sit and wait. I'm going to do something."

"What, Tim? What is there to do?"

"I know!" His voice dropped. "Di, do you remember that queer gem the government expedition brought back from Titan? The one Mrs. Advent paid half a million dollars for, just so she could wear it to the opera?"

"I remember the story, Tim. I never heard of Titan."

"One of Saturn's moons. United States possession; there's a confirmatory settlement\* on it. It's habitable."

\* Note. "Confirmatory settlements" were those created under the international law requiring at least one permanent resident in order to confirm a nation's claim to a planet. This applied only to habitable worlds, of course, not to the airless, which were—and are—free for anybody to claim—if anybody wants them.

"Oh!" she said, puzzled. "But—what about it?"

"Just this: Last year half a dozen traders went up there after more. One of 'em returned to-day with five of the things; I saw it on the news broadcast. He's rich, Di. Those things are almost priceless."

Diane began to see. "Tim!" she said huskily.

"Yes. That's the idea. I'm going to leave you all I can, except what money I must have, and go up there for a year. I've read up on Titan; I know what to take." He paused. "It's coming near Perigee now. There'll be a rocket leaving for Nivia—that's the settlement—in a week."

"Tim!" murmured Diane again. "Titan—oh, I did hear of it! That's—that's the cold one, isn't it?"

"Cold as Dante's hell," replied Tim. He saw her lips form a word of protest and his blue eyes went narrow and stubborn.

She changed her unspoken word. "I'm going with you," she said. Her brown eyes narrowed to meet his.

Diane had won. That was over now—the long hours of argument, the final submission, the months of insufferably stuffy air aboard the rocket, the laborious struggle to erect the tiny hemispherical metal-walled shack that served as living quarters. The rocket had dropped them, cargo and all, at a point determined after a long conference back on Earth with Simonds, the returned trader.

He had been an agreeable sort, but rather discouraging; his description of the Titanian climate had sounded rather like a word picture of an Eskimo hell. He hadn't exaggerated, either; Tim realized that now and cursed the weakness that had made him yield to Diane's insistence.

Well, there they were. He was smoking his single permitted daily cigarette, and Diane was reading aloud from a history of the world, taken because it had some thousand pages and would last a long time. Outside was the unbelievable Titanian night with its usual hundred-mile gale screaming against the curved walls, and the glitter of ice mountains showing green under the glare of Saturn with its rings visible edgewise. One always saw them edgewise from the satellite since it revolved in the same plane.

Beyond the Mountains of the Damned—so named by Young, the discoverer—a hundred miles away, lay Nivia, the City of Snow. But they might as well have been on a planet of Van Maanen's star so far as human contacts went; surely no one could survive a cross-country journey here through nights that were generally eighty below zero, or even days that sometimes attained the balmy warmth of just above freezing. No; they were marooned here until the rocket returned next year.

Tim shivered as the grinding roar of a shifting mountain sounded above the scream of the wind. That was common enough here; they were always shifting under the enormous tidal pull of the giant Saturn and the thrust of that incredible wind. But it was disquieting, none the less; it was an ever-present danger to their little dwelling.

"Br-r-r!" He shuddered. "Listen to that!"

Diane looked up. "Not used to it yet, after three months?"

"And never will be!" he returned. "What a place!"

She smiled. "I know what'll cheer you," she said, rising. From a tin box she poured a cascade of fire. "Look, Tim! Six of them. Six flame-orchids!"\*

He gazed at the glowing eggs of light. Like the flush of life itself, rainbow rings rolled in a hundred tints beneath their surfaces. Diane passed her hand above them, and they responded to its warmth with a flame of changing colors that swept the entire keyboard of the spectrum, reds merging into blues, violets, greens, and yellows, then orange and scarlet of blood.

"They're beautiful!" Tim whispered, staring fascinated. "No wonder rich women bleed themselves dry for them. Diane, we'll save one out—the prettiest—for you."

She laughed. "These are things I'd rather have, Tim."

A pounding sounded above the windy howling. They knew what it meant: Tim rose, and peered through the reinforced window into the brilliant night, and, after a moment of blinking, made out the four-foot-long body of a native sprawled before the door, his curved claws hooked into the ice. On Titan, of course, no creature stood erect against those perpetual howling blasts, no creature, that is, save man, a recent arrival from a gentler world.

Tim opened the door, slipping it wider notch by notch on its retaining chain, since muscular power would have been inadequate to hold it. The wind bellowed gleefully in, sweeping the hanging utensils on the walls into a clanging chorus, spinning a loose garment into a mad dance, chilling the air to bitterness.

The native slithered through like a walrus, his streamlined body scallike and glistening with its two-inch protective layer of blubbery flesh. As Tim cranked the door shut, the creature raised the filmy underlid from its eyes, and they showed large, luminous, and doglike.

This was a Titanian native, not much more intelligent than a St. Bernard dog, perhaps, but peaceable and inoffensive, beautifully adapted to its forbidding environment, and the highest form of life yet known on Titan.

He reached into the pouch opening on his rubbery back. "Uah!" he said, displaying a white ovoid. As the comparatively warm air of the room struck it, the flame-orchid began to glow in exquisite colors.

Diane took it; against her palms the tints changed more quickly, deepened gloriously. It was a small one, no larger than a robin's egg, but perfect except where it had been attached to some frigid rock.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "What a beauty, Tim!"

He grinned. "That's no way to bargain."

He pulled out the black case that contained their trade goods, opening it to display the little mirrors, knives, beads, matches, and nondescript trinkets.

The coal-black eyes of the native glittered avidly; he glanced from one article to the next in an agony of longing indecision. He touched them with

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\* Note. "Flame orchids" the name given to the Titanian gems that caused such admiration twenty years ago. It is not known whether they are products of some form of life—as sea shells on Earth—or whether they are merely inorganic crystalline growths. The composition is largely a complex chromium borate, thermo-sensitive; and the colors change strikingly with any slight temperature variation. Even now, when the inferior ones called chromatics are grown on Earth, science still argues the question of whether they are living forms.



his clawed, three-fingered hands; he cooed buskily. His eyes wandered over the room.

"*Hurt!*" he said abruptly, pointing.

Diane burst into a sudden laugh. He was indicating an old and battered eight-day clock, quite useless to the pair since it lacked the adjustment to permit to keep other than Earth time. The ticking must have attracted him.

"Oh, no!" She chuckled. "It's no good to you. Here!" She indicated a box of trinkets.

"*Ugha! Hurt!*" The native was insistent.

"Here, then!"

She passed him the clock; he held it close to his skin-shielded ears and listened. He cooed.

Impulsively, Diane picked a pocketknife from the box. "Here," she said. "I won't cheat you. Take this, too."

The native gurgled. He pried open the glittering blade with his hooked claws, closed it and slipped it carefully into his back pouch, stuffing the clock after it. The pouch stood out like a miniature hump as he turned and scuttled toward the door.

"*Uah!*" he said.

Tim let him out, watching through the window as he slipped across the slope, his blunt nose pointed into the wind as he moved sideways.

Tim faced Diane. "Extravagance!" He grinned.

"Oh, a fifty-cent knife for this!" She fondled the gem.

"Fifty cents back home," he reminded her. "Just remember what we paid for freight, and you'll see what I mean. Why, look at Nivia; they mine gold there, pure, virgin gold right out of the rocks, and by the time the cost of shipping it back to Earth is deducted, and the insurance, it barely pays—just barely."

"Gold?"

"Yes. That's simple to understand. You know how little freight a rocket can carry when it has to be fueled and provisioned for a flight from the Earth to Titan, or vice versa. A mere jaunt of seven hundred and eighty million miles and plenty of chance for trouble on the way. I think the insurance on gold is thirty per cent of the value."

"Tim, shall we have to insure these? How shall we ever manage?"

"We won't. We won't insure these because we'll be going with 'em."

"But if they're lost?"

"If they're lost, Diane, insurance wouldn't help us, because, then, we'll be lost, too."

## II.

Three more months dragged by. Their little hoard of flame-orchids reached fifteen, then eighteen. They realized, of course, that the gems wouldn't command the fabulous price of that first one, but half that price, even a tenth of it, meant wealth, meant leisure and luxury. It was worth the year of sacrifice.

Titan swung endlessly about its primary. Nine-hour days succeeded nine-

hour nights of unbelievable ferocity. The eternal wind howled and bit and tore, and the shifting ice mountains heaved and roared under Saturn's tidal drag.

Sometimes, during the day, the pair ventured into the open, fought the boisterous winds, clung precariously to frigid slopes. Once Diane was swept bodily away, saving herself miraculously on the verge of one of the deep and mysterious crevasses that bounded their mountain slope, and thereafter they were very cautious.

Once they dared to penetrate the grove of rubbery and elastic whiplash trees that grew in the shelter of the nearest cliff. The things lashed out at them with resounding strokes, not violent enough to fell them, but stinging sharply even through the inch-thick layer of sponge rubber that insulated their bodies from the cold.

And every seven and a half days the wind died to a strange and oddly silent calm, was still for half an hour or so, and then roared with renewed ferocity from the opposite direction. Thus it marked Titan's revolution.

At almost equal intervals, every eight days, the native appeared with the flock. The creature seemed unable to master the intricate problem of winding it and always presented it mournfully, brightening at once as Diane set it ticking again.

There was one impending event that worried Tim at times. Twice in its thirty-year period Saturn eclipses the Sun, and for four Titanian days, seventy-two hours, Titan is in utter darkness. The giant planet was nearing that point now and would reach it long before the rocket ship, speeding from the Earth at perigee, was due.

Human occupation dated back only six years; no one knew what four days of darkness might do to the little world of Titan. The absolute zero of space? Probably not, because of the dense and xenon-rich atmosphere, but what storms, what titanic upheavals of ice, might accompany that night of eclipse? Glowing Saturn itself supplied a little heat, of course, about a third as much as the distant Sun.

Well, worry was futile. Tim glanced at Diane, mending a rip in the furry face-mask of her outdoor garment, and suggested a stroll. "A stroll in the sunlight," he phrased it sardonically. It was August back on Earth.

Diane agreed. She always agreed, cheerfully and readily. Without her this project would have been utterly unbearable, and he wondered amazedly how Simonds had stood it, how those others scattered around Titan's single little continent were standing it. He sighed, slipped into his thick garment, and opened the door into the roaring hell outside.

That was the time they came near disaster. They crawled, crept, and struggled their way into the lee of an ice hummock, and stood there panting and gasping for a moment's rest. Tim raised his head to peer over the crest and saw through his visor's protecting goggles something unique in his experience on Titan. He frowned at it through the dense refractive air of the planet; it was hard to judge distances when the atmosphere made everything quiver like heat waves.

"Look, Di!" he exclaimed. "A bird!"

It did look like one, sailing on the wind toward them, wings outspread. It grew larger; it was as large as a pterodactyl, bearing down on them with the force of that hundred-mile wind behind it. Tim could make out a fierce, three-foot beak.

Diane screamed. The thing was headed for them; it was diving now at airplane speed. It was the girl who seized and flung a jagged piece of ice; the thing veered higher, swept like a cloud above them, and was gone. It could not fly upwind.

They looked it up in Young's book at the shack. That intrepid explorer had seen and named the creature; it was a knife-kite, the same sort of beast that had accounted for the death of one of his men. It wasn't a bird; it didn't really fly; it just sailed like a kite before the terrific blasts of Titan, and touched ground only during the weekly calm or when it had succeeded in stabbing some prey.

But life was scarce indeed on the icy little world. Except for the occasional natives, who came and went mysteriously as spirits, and that single knife-kite, and the whiplash trees near the cliff, they saw nothing living. Of course the crystal bubbles of the ice-ants marked the glacial surface of the hills, but these creatures never emerged, but labored incessantly beneath their little domes that grew like mushrooms as they melted within and received fresh deposits of ice crystals without. A lonely world, a wild, bizarre, forbidding, and unearthly little planet.

It never actually snowed on Titan. The chill air could absorb too little water vapor for condensation as snow, but there was a substitute. During the days, when the temperature often passed the melting point, shallow pools formed on the frozen oceans, augmented sometimes by mighty eruptions of frigid brine from below. The ferocious winds swept these pools into a spindrift that froze and went rushing as clouds of icy needles around the planet.

Often during the darkness Diane had watched from the window as one of these clouds loomed glittering in the cold-green Saturn-light, sweeping by with a scream and a slithering of ice crystals on the walls, and seeming to her mind like a tall, sheeted ghost. At such times, despite the atom-generated warmth of the tiny dwelling, she was apt to shiver and draw her garment closer about her, though she was careful that Tim never observed it.

So time passed in the trading shack, slowly and dismally. The weather, of course, was uniformly, unvaryingly terrible, such weather as only Titan, nearly nine hundred million miles from the moderating Sun, can present. The little world, with its orbital period of fifteen days and twenty three hours, has no perceptible seasons; only the recurrent shifting of the winds from east to west marks its swing about gigantic Saturn.

The season is always winter—fierce, bitter, unimaginable winter, to which the earthly storms of desolate antarctica are as April on the Riviera. And little by little, Saturn edged closer to the Sun, until one day the western streak of its rings knifed a dark gash across the reddish disk. The eclipse was at hand.

That night saw the catastrophe. Tim was dozing on the bunk; Diane was dreaming idly of green fields and warm sunlight. Outside roared a gale more

than usually vociferous, and a steady parade of the ice ghosts streamed past the windows. Low and ominous came the roar of shifting glacial mountains; Saturn and the Sun, now nearly in a direct line, heaved at the planet with a redoubled tidal pull. And then suddenly came the clang of warning; a bell rang ominously.

Diane knew what it meant. Months before, Tim had driven a row of posts into the ice, extending toward the cliff that sheltered the whiplash grove. He had foreseen the danger; he had rigged up an alarm. The bell means that the cliff had shifted, had rolled upon the first of the stakes. Danger!

Tim was springing frantically from the bunk. "Dress for outside!" he snapped. "Quickly!"

He seized her heavy sponge-rubber parka and tossed it to her. He dragged on his own, cranked the door open to the pandemonium without, and a fierce and bitter blast swept in, upsetting a chair, spinning loose articles around the room.

"Close the emergency pack!" he yelled about the tumult. "I'll take a look."

Diane suppressed her upsurging fear as he vanished. She strapped the pack tightly, then poured the precious eighteen flame-orchids into a little leather pouch, and suspended this about her throat. She forced calmness upon herself; perhaps the ice cliff had stopped, or perhaps only the wind itself had snapped the warning post. She righted the chair and sat with her visor open despite the knife-sharp blasts from the door.

Tim was coming. She saw his gloved hand as he seized the doorframe, then his fur-masked face, eyes grim behind the nonfreezing goggles.

"Outside!" he yelled, seizing the pack.

She rose and scrambled after him into the howling inferno just as the second bell clanged.

Barely in time! As the tornado sent her sprawling and clutching, she had a sharply etched glimpse of a mighty pinnacle of glittering ice looming high above the shock; there was a rumble and a roar deeper than the winds, and the shack was gone. One iron wall, caught by the gale, swept like a giant bat above her, and she heard it go clanging and clattering along the slope to the east.

Dazed and horribly frightened, she clawed her way after Tim into the shelter of a ridge, watching him while he wrestled the pack that struggled in the blast like something living. She was calm when at last he got it strapped to his shoulders.

"This is the end, isn't it, Tim?" she said, putting her visor close against his helmet. "Because I'm glad I came with you, then. I'm glad it's both of us together."

Tim groaned despairingly, and the blast tore the sound away. He turned suddenly, slipping his arms around her figure.

"I'm sorry, Di," he said huskily.

He wanted to kiss her—an impossibility, of course, in a Titanian night. It would have been a kiss of death; they would have died with lips frozen each to the other's. He put away the thought that maybe that might be the pleasanter

way, since death was inevitable now, anyway. Better, he decided, to die fighting. He pulled her down into the lee of the ridge and sat thinking.

They couldn't stay here; that was obvious. The rocket wasn't due for three months, and long before then they'd be frozen corpses, rolling away before the hurricane or buried in some crevasse. They couldn't build a habitable shelter without tools, and if they could, their atomic stove was somewhere under the shifting cliff. They couldn't attempt the journey to Nivia, a hundred miles away across the Mountains of the Damned—or could they? That was the only possible alternative.

"Di," Tim said tensely, "we're going to Nivia. Don't be startled. Listen. The wind's just shifted. It's behind us, we have almost eight Earth days before it changes. If we can make it—twelve, thirteen, miles a day—if we can make it, we'll be safe. If we don't make it before the wind shifts——" He paused. "Well, it's no worse than dying here."

Diane was silent. Tim frowned thoughtfully behind his goggles. It was a possibility. Pack, parka, and all, he weighed less than Earth weight; not as much less as one would think, of course. Titan, although no larger than Mercury, is a dense little world, and, besides, weight depends not only on a planet's density, but also on distance from its center. But the wind might not hinder them so much, since they were traveling with it, not against it. Its terrible thrust, fiercer than even an equal Earth wind because the air contained thirty per cent of the heavy gas xenon, would be dangerous enough, but—— Anyway, they had no choice.

"Come on, Di," Tim said, rising. They had to keep moving now; they could rest later, after sunrise, when the danger of a frozen sleep was less.

Another terrible thought struck Tim—there would be only three more sunrises. Then for four Titanian days, the little satellite would be in the mighty shadow of Saturn, and during that long eclipse, Heaven alone knew what terrific forces might attack the harassed pair crawling painfully toward Nivia, the City of Snow.

But that had to be faced, too. There was no alternative. Tim lifted Diane to her feet, and they crept cautiously out of the shelter of the ridge, bowing as the cruel wind caught them and bruised them, even through their thick suits, by flying ice fragments.

It was a dark night for Titan; Saturn was on the other side of the little world, along with the Sun it was soon to eclipse, but the stars shone brilliant and twinkling through the shallow, but very dense and refractive, atmosphere. The Earth, which had so often lent a green spark of cheer to the lonely couple, was not among them; from the position of Titan, it was always near the Sun and showed only just before sunrise or just after sunset. Its absence now seemed a desolate omen.

They came to a long, smooth, windswept slope. They made the error of trying to cross it erect, trusting to their deated shoes for secure footing. It was misjudgment; the wind thrust them suddenly into a run, pressed them faster and faster until it was impossible to stop, and they were staggering through the darkness toward unknown terrain ahead.

Tim flung himself recklessly against Diane; they fell in a heap and went

sliding and rolling, to crash at last against a low wall of ice a hundred feet beyond.

They struggled up, and Diane moaned inaudibly from the pain of a bruised knee. They crept cautiously on; they circled a bottomless crevasse from the depths of which came strange roarings and shriekings; they slipped miserably past a glowering cliff that shook and shifted above them. And when at last the vast bulk of Saturn rose over the wild land before them, and the tiny red-dish Sun followed like a ruby hung on a pendant, they were near exhaustion.

Tim supported Diane to a crevice facing the Sun. For many minutes they were silent, content to rest, and then he took a bar of chocolate from the pack and they ate, slipping the squares hastily through visors opened for each bite.

But under the combined radiance of Saturn and the Sun, the temperature rose rapidly more than a hundred degrees; when Tim glanced at his wrist thermometer it was already nearly thirty-eight, and pools of water were forming in the wind-sheltered spots. He scooped some up with a rubber cup, and they drank. Water at least was no problem.

Food might be, however, if they lived long enough to consume that in the pack. Humans couldn't eat Titanian life because of its arsenical metabolism; they had to exist on food laboriously transported from the Earth, or, as did the Nivian settlers, on Titanian creatures from whose substance the arsenic had first been chemically removed. The Nivians ate the ice-ants, the whiplash trees, and occasionally, it was sometimes whispered, the Titanian natives.

Diane had fallen asleep, lying huddled in a pool of icy water that flowed off into the open and then was whirled into sparkling spray by the wind. He shook her gently; they couldn't afford to lose time now, not with the shadow of the eclipse looming ominously so few hours away. But it tore his heart to see her eyes crinkle in a weary smile as she rose; he damned himself again for ever bringing her to this.

So they plodded on, battered and trampled by the fierce and ruthless gale. He had no idea how far they had traveled during the night; from the crest of a high ridge he looked back, but the shifting hills of ice made localities hard to recognize, and he could not be sure that the grim escarpment far behind was actually the cliff that had crushed their shack.

He let Diane rest again from noon until sunset, nearly five hours. She regained much of the strength spent in the struggle of the night, but when the dropping sun set his wrist thermometer tumbling far toward the hundred-below-zero mark, it seemed to her as if she had not rested at all. Yet they survived another night of inferno, and the gray of dawn found them still staggering and stumbling before the incredible ferocity of that eternal wind.

During the morning a native appeared. They recognized him; in his clawed hands was the battered case of the eight-day clock. He tilted up to them, head toward the wind, and held out his short arms to display the mechanism; he whined plaintively and obviously thought himself cheated.

Tim felt an unreasoning hope at the sight of him, but it vanished immediately. The creature simply couldn't understand their predicament; Titan was the only world he knew, and he couldn't conceive of beings not adapted to

its fierce environment. So the man stood silently as Diane wound the clock and responded dully to her smile as she returned it.

"This time, old fellow," she said to the native, "it's ticking away our lives. If we're not in Nivia by the time it stops again——" She patted the blunt head; the creature cooed and sidled away.

### III.

They rested and slept again during the afternoon, but it was a weary pair that faced the inferno of night. Diane was nearing exhaustion, not from lack of nourishment, but simply from the incessant battering she had received from the wind, and the terrific struggle that every step required. Tim was stronger, but his body ached, and the cold, striking somehow through the thick parka, had left him with a painfully frostbitten shoulder.

By two hours after sunset, he perceived hopelessly that Diane was not going to survive the night. She was struggling bravely, but she was unequal to the effort. She was weakening; the pitiless wind kept dashing her to her knees, and each time she rose more slowly, leaned more heavily on Tim's supporting arm. All too quickly came the moment he had foreseen with despairing heart, when she did not rise at all.

He crouched beside her; tears misted his goggles as he distinguished her words above the screaming of the blast.

"You go on, Tim," she murmured. She gestured toward the bag on her throat. "Take the flame-orchids and leave me."

Tim made no answer, but cradled her tired body in his arms, shielding her as best he could from the furious winds. He thought desperately. To remain here was quick death; at least he might carry Diane to some more sheltered spot, where they could sink more slowly into the fatal sleep of cold. To leave her was unthinkable; she knew that, too, but it had been a brave offer to make.

She clung weakly to him as he lifted her; he staggered a dozen steps before the wind toppled him. He tried again, tried a third time, and the last struggle brought him to the lee of a low hillock. He dropped behind it and gathered the girl into his arms to wait for the cold to do its work.

He stared hopelessly ahead. The wild splendor of a Titanian night was before him, with the icy stars glittering on cold and glassy peaks. Just beyond their hillock stretched the smooth surface of a wind-swept glacier, and here and there were the crystalline bubbles of the ice ants.

The ice ants! Lucky little creatures! He remembered Young's description of them in the book at the shack. Within those domes it was warm; the temperature was above forty. He stared at them, fragile and yet resisting that colossal wind. He knew why; it was their ovoid shape, the same principle that enables an egg to resist the greatest pressure on its two ends. No one can break an egg by squeezing it endways.

Suddenly he started. A hope! He murmured a word to Diane, lifted her and staggered out on the mirror surface of the ice. There! There was a dome

large enough—fully six feet across. He circled to the lee side and kicked a hole in the glittering roundness.

Diane crawled weakly through. He followed, crouching beside her in the dusk. Would it work? He gave a long cry of relief as he perceived the scurrying three-inch figures of the ice-ants, saw them patching the dome with crystal fragments.

Steam misted his nonfrothing goggles. He drew Diane against him and then opened his visor. Warm air! It was like balm after the bitter air without; it was musty, perhaps—but warm! He opened Diane's; she was sleeping in exhaustion and never stirred as he uncovered her pale, drawn features.

His eyes grew accustomed to the gloomy starlight that filtered through the dome. He could see the ice-ants, little three-legged ruddy balls that ran about with a galloping motion. They weren't ants at all, of course, not even insects in the terrestrial sense; Young had named them ants because they lived in antlike colonies.

Tim saw the two holes that pierced the saucerlike floor; through one, he knew, warm air came up from the mysterious hive below, and the other drained away the melting water of the dome. That dome would grow until it burst, but the ants didn't care; they'd sense the bursting point and have a new dome already started above the holes.

For a time he watched them; they paid no attention at all to the intruders, whose rubber suits offered nothing edible. They were semicivilized little creatures; he observed them curiously as they scraped a gray mold from the ice, loaded it on tiny sledges that he recognized as leaves of the whiplash tree, and tugged the load to one of the holes, dumping it in, presumably, to a handling crew below. And after a while he fell asleep, and precious time trickled away.

Hours later something awakened him to daylight. He sat up; he had been lying with his head pillowed on his arm to keep his face from the water, and he rubbed the half-paralyzed limb ruefully as he stared about. Diane was still sleeping, but her face was more peaceful, more rested. He smiled gently down on her, and suddenly a flicker of motion caught his eye and, at the same time, a flash of brilliance.

The first was only an ice-ant scurrying across the rubber of her parka. The flash was—he started violently—it was a flame-orchid rolling sluggishly in the stream of water to the vent, and there went another! The ants had cut and carried away for food the little leather bag, exposed on Diane's breast by the opening of her visor.

He snatched the rolling gem of flame from the trickling water and searched desperately for the others. No use. Of their eighteen precious ovoids, he had retrieved exactly one—the small but perfect one for which they had traded the clock. He gazed in utter despondency at the flaming little egg for which they had risked—and probably lost—everything.

Diane stirred, sat up. She saw at once the consternation in his face. "Tim!" she cried. "What's wrong now?"

He told her. "It's my fault," he concluded grimly. "I opened your suit. I



should have foreseen this." He slipped the lone gem into his left gauntlet, where it nestled against his palm.

"It's nothing, Tim," said Diane softly. "What use would all eighteen be to us, or a hundred? We might as well die with one as with all of them."

He did not answer directly. He said: "Even one will be enough if we get back. Perhaps eighteen would have glutted the market; perhaps we'll get almost as much for one as we would have for all."

That was a lie, of course; other traders would be increasing the supply, but it served to distract her mind.

Tim noticed then that the ice-ants were busy around the two vents at the center; they were building an inner dome. The crystal egg above them, now eight feet through, was about to crack.

He saw it coming, and they closed their visors. There was a jagged streak of light on the west, and suddenly, with a glistening of fragments, the walls collapsed and went spinning away over the icy floor, and the wind howled down upon them, nearly flattening them to the glacier. It began to thrust them over the ice.

They slid and crawled their way to the jagged crags beyond. Diane was strong again; her young body recovered quickly. In a momentary shelter, he noticed something queer about the light and glanced up to see gigantic Saturn almost half obscuring the Sun. He remembered then. This was the last day; for seventy-two hours there would be night.

And night fell far too quickly. Sunset came with the red disk three quarters obscured, and the bitter cold swept out of the west with a horde of ice ghosts, whose sharp needles clogged the filters of their masks and forced them to shake them out time after time.

The temperature had never been higher than forty below all day, and the night air, coming after that cold day, dropped rapidly to a hundred below, and even the warming filters could not prevent that frigid air from burning in their lungs like searing flame.

Tim sought desperately for an ice-ant bubble. Those large enough were rare, and when at last he found one, it was already too large, and the ice-ants didn't trouble to repair the hole he kicked, but set at once to build a new dome. In half an hour the thing collapsed, and they were driven on.

Somehow, they survived the night, and dawn of the fourth day found them staggering all but helpless into the lee of a cliff. They stared hopelessly at that strange, sunless, Saturn-lighted dawn that brought so little warmth.

An hour after the rising of the eclipsed Sun, Tim glanced at his wrist thermometer to find the temperature risen only to seventy below. They ate some chocolate, but each bite was a burning pain for the moment that their visors were open, and the chocolate itself was numbing cold.

When numbness and drowsiness began to attack his limbs, Tim forced Diane to rise, and they struggled on. Day was no better than night now, except for the cold Saturn light. The wind battered them more fiercely than ever; it was scarcely mid-afternoon, when Diane, with a faintly audible moan, collapsed to her knees and could not rise.

Tim stared frantically about for an ice bubble. At last, far over to the

right, he saw a small one, three feet through, perhaps, but big enough for Diane. He could not carry her; he took her shoulders and dragged her painfully to it. She managed to creep wearily in, and he warned her to sleep with her visor closed, lest the ants attack her face. A quarter of a mile downwind he found one for himself.

It was the collapse of the bubble that awakened him. It was night again, a horrible, shrieking, howling, blasting night when the temperature on his thermometer showed a hundred and forty below. Stark fear gripped him. If Diane's shelter had fallen! He fought his way madly against the wind to the spot and shouted in relief. The dome had grown, but still stood; he kicked his way in to find Diane trembling and pallid; she had feared him lost or dead. It was almost dawn before the shelter collapsed.

Strangely, that day was easier. It was bitterly cold, but they had reached the foothills of the Mountains of the Damned, and ice-covered crags offered shelter from the winds. Diane's strength held better; they made the best progress they had yet achieved.

But that meant little now, for there before them, white and glittering and cold, loomed the range of mountains, and Tim despaired when he looked at them. Just beyond, perhaps twenty-five miles away, lay Nivia and safety, but how were they ever to cross those needle peaks?

Diane was still on her feet at nightfall. Tim left her standing in the shelter of a bank of ice and set out to find an ant bubble. But this time he failed. He found only a few tiny six-inch domes; there was nothing that offered refuge from a night that promised to be fiercer than any he had seen. He returned at last in despair.

"We'll have to move farther," he told her.

Her grave, weary eyes frightened him.

"No matter," she said quietly. "We'll never cross the Mountains of the Damned, Tim. But I love you."

They moved on. The night dropped quickly to a hundred and forty below, and their limbs turned numb and slow to respond. Ice ghosts whirled past them; cliffs quaked and rumbled. In half an hour they were both nearing exhaustion, and no crystal shelter appeared.

In the lee of a ridge Diane paused, swaying against him. "No use, Tim," she murmured. "I'd rather die here than fight longer. I can't." She let herself sink to the ice, and that action saved their lives.

Tim bent over her, and as he did a black shadow and glistening beak cleaved the air where his head had been. A knife-kite! Its screech of anger drifted faintly back as it whirled away on that hundred-mile wind.

"You see," said the girl, "it's hopeless."

#### IV.

Tim gazed dully around, and it was then that he saw the funnel. Young had mentioned these curious caves in the ice, and sometimes in the rocks, of the Mountains of the Damned. Opening always north or south, he had thought them the homes of the natives, so placed and shaped to prevent their

filling with ice needles. But the traders had learned that the natives have no homes.

"We're going in there!" Tim cried.

He helped Diane to her feet and they crept into the opening. The funnel-like passage narrowed, then widened suddenly into a chamber, where steam condensed instantly on their goggles. That meant warmth; they opened their visors, and Tim pulled out his electric torch.

"Look!" gasped Diane. In the curious chamber, walled half by ice and half by the rock of the mountain, lay what was unmistakably a fallen, carved column.

"Good Heaven!" Tim was startled momentarily from his worries. "This iceberg harbored a native culture once! I'd never have given those primitive devils credit for it."

"Perhaps the natives weren't responsible," said the girl. "Perhaps there was once some higher creature on Titan, hundreds of thousands of years ago, when Saturn was hot enough to warm it. Or perhaps there still is."

Her guess was disastrously right. A voice said, "Uzza, uzza, uzza," and they turned to start at the creature emerging from a hole in the rock wall. A face—no, not a face, but a proboscis like the head end of a giant earthworm, that kept thrusting itself to a point, then contracting to a horrible, red, ringed disk.

At the point was the hollow fang or sucking tooth, and above it on a quivering stalk, the ice-green, hypnotic eye of a Titanian threadworm, the first ever to be faced by man.\* They gazed in horrified fascination as the tubular body slid into the chamber, its ropelike form diminishing at the end to the thickness of a hair.

"Uzza, uzza, uzza," it said, and strangely, their minds translated the sounds. The thing was saying "Sleep, sleep, sleep," over and over.

Tim snatched for his revolver—or intended to. The snatch turned into a gentle, almost imperceptible movement, and then died to immobility. He was held utterly helpless under the glare of the worm's eye.

"Uzza, uzza, uzza," thrummed the thing in a soothing, slumberous buzz. "Uzza, uzza, uzza." The sound drummed deeply in his ears. He was sleepy, anyway, worn to exhaustion by the hell without. "Uzza, uzza, uzza." Why not sleep?

It was the quick-witted Diane who saved them. Her voice snapped him to wakefulness. "We are sleeping," she said. "We're both asleep. This is the way we sleep. Don't you see? We're both fast asleep."

The thing said "Uzza, uzza," and paused as if perplexed.

"I tell you we're sleeping!" insisted Diane.

"Uzza!" buzzed the worm.

It was silent, stretching its terrible face toward Diane. Suddenly Tim's arm snapped in sharp continuation of his interrupted movement, the gun burned cold through his glove, and then spat blue flame.

\* Note. "Titanian threadworm"—Nemertodermis Titan, the curious quasi-intelligent, sinister creature now believed to be the author of the decayed Titanian civilization, since it is always found among the ruins. It is not dangerous to man if he has a moment of warning; otherwise it is horribly so.

A shriek answered. The worm, coiled like a spring, shot its bloody face toward the girl. Unthinking, Tim leaped upon it; his legs tangled in its ropy length and he crashed on his hands against the rocky wall. But the worm was fragile; it was dead and in several pieces when he rose.

"Oh!" gasped Diane, her face white. "How—how horrible! Let's get away—quickly!" She swayed and sat weakly on the floor.

"It's death outside," said Tim grimly.

He gathered the ropy worm in his hands, stuffed it back into the hole whence it had emerged. Then, very cautiously, he flashed his beam into the opening, peered through. He drew back quickly.

"Ugh!" he said, shuddering.

"What, Tim? What's there?"

"A—a brood of 'em." He raised the broken end of the column in his arms; the shaft fitted the hole. "At least that will fall if another comes," he muttered. "We'll be warned. Di, we've got to rest here a while. Neither of us could last an hour out there."

She smiled wanly. "What's the difference, Tim? I'd rather die in clean cold than by—by those things." But in five minutes she was sleeping.

As soon as she slept, Tim slipped the glove from his left hand and stared gloomily at their lone flame-orchid. He had felt it shatter when he struck the wall, and there it lay, colorless, broken, worthless. They had nothing left now, nothing but life, and probably little more of that.

He cast the pieces to the rock-dusty floor and then seized a fragment of stone and viciously pounded the jewel into dull powder and tiny splinters. It vented his feelings.

Despite his determination, he must have dozed. He woke with a start, glanced fearfully at the plugged hole, and then noticed that dim green light filtered through the ice wall. Dawn. At least, as much dawn as they'd get during the eclipse. They'd have to leave at once, for to-day they must cross the peaks. They must, for to-night would see the shifting of the wind, and when that occurred, hope would vanish.

He woke Diane, who sat up so wearily that his eyes felt tears of pity. She made no comment when he suggested leaving, but there was no hope in her obedience. He rose to creep through the funnel, to be there to help her when the wind struck her.

"Tim!" she shrieked. "Tim! What's that?"

He spun around. She was pointing at the floor where he had slept and where now flashed a thousand changing colors like rainbow fire. Flame-orchids! Each splinter he had cracked from the ruined one was now a fiery gem; each tiny grain was sprouting from the rock dust of the floor.

Some were as large as the original, some were tiny flames no bigger than peas, but all glowed perfect and priceless. Fifty of them—a hundred, if one counted the tiny ones.

They gathered them. Tim told her of their origin, and carefully wrapped a few grains of the rock dust in tinfoil from their chocolate.

"Have it analyzed," he explained. "Perhaps we can raise 'em back on Earth."

"If we ever——" began Diane, and then was silent. Let Tim find what pleasure he could in the discovery.

She followed him through the passage into the howling inferno of Titanian eclipse weather.

That day gave both of them all the experience of souls condemned to hell. They struggled hour after hour up the ice-coated slopes of the Mountains of the Damned. The air thinned and turned so cold that the hundred and fifty below which was the minimum on Tim's thermometer dial was insufficient, and the needle rested full against the stop.

The wind kept flinging them flat against the slopes, and a dozen times the very mountains heaved beneath them. And this was day; what, he wondered fearfully, would night be like, here among the peaks of the Mountains of the Damned?

Diane drove herself to the limit, and even beyond. This was their last chance; at least they must surmount the crest before the wind shifted. Again and again she fell, but each time she rose and clambered on. And for a time, just before evening, it seemed that they might make it.

A mile from the summit the wind died to that weird, unnatural calm that marked, if you care to call it so, the half-hour Titanian summer season. They burst into a final effort; they rushed up the rugged slope until their blood pounded in their ears. And a thousand feet short of the summit, while they clung helplessly to a steep icy incline, they heard far off the rising whine that meant failure.

Tim paused; effort was useless now. He cast one final glance over the wild magnificence of the Titanian landscape, then leaned close to Diane.

"Good-by, ever valiant," he murmured. "I think you loved not more than I deserved."

Then, with a bellow of triumph, the wind howled down from the peaks, sending them sliding helplessly along the crag into darkness.

It was night when Tim recovered. He was stiff, numb, battered, but living. Diane was close beside him; they had been caught in a cupped hollow full of ice crystals.

He bent over the girl. In that roaring wind he couldn't tell if she lived; at least her body was limp, not yet frozen or set in the rigor of death. He did the only thing possible to him; he clutched her wrist and started clawing his way against that impossible gale, dragging her behind him.

A quarter mile away showed the summit. He ascended a dozen feet; the wind hurled him back. He gained fifty feet; the wind smashed him back into the hollow. Yet, somehow, dazed, all but unconscious, he managed to drag, push, roll Diane's body along with him.

He never knew how long it took, but he made it. While the wind bellowed in colossal anger, somehow, by some miracle of doggedness, he thrust Diane across the ridge of the summit, dragged himself after, and grazed without comprehension on the valley beyond, where glowed the lights of Nivia, the City of Snow.

For a while he could only cling there, then some ghost of reason returned. Diane, loyal, courageous Diane, was here dying, perhaps dead. Doggedly,

persistently, he pushed and rolled her down the slope against a wind that sometimes lifted her into mid-air and flung her back against his face. For a long time he remembered nothing at all, and then suddenly he was pounding on a metal door, and it was opening.

Tim couldn't sleep yet. He had to find out about Diane, so he followed the government man back through the sunken passage to the building that served Nivia as hospital. The flame-orchids were checked in, safe; theft was impossible in Nivia, with only fifty inhabitants and no way for the thief to escape.

The doctor was bending over Diane; he had stripped off her parka and was flexing her arms, then her bared legs.

"Nothing broken," he said to Tim. "Just shock, exposure, exhaustion, half a dozen frostbites, and a terrific mauling from the wind. Oh, yes—and a minor concussion. And a hundred bruises, more or less."

"Is that all?" breathed Tim. "Are you sure that's all?"

"Isn't that enough?" snapped the doctor.

"But she'll—live?"

"She'll tell you so herself in half an hour." His tone changed to admiration. "I don't see how you did it! This'll be a legend, I tell you. And I hear you're rich, too," he added enviously. "Well, I've a feeling you deserve it."

# Mommy

by Mary Elizabeth Connelman

*Mrs. Connelman's great forte is her knack of devising new and unusual twists to the ghost story theme. Possibly this time her success can be attributed to the fact that, being herself a mother, she was able to find an angle that others would never think of. In any case, "Mommy" is one of those tender ghost tales we have come to associate with this author.*

"I WANT to adopt a child about seven years old," Mrs. Ellison had explained to the matron a few hours before.

Now, standing in the big bare yard of the Acipco County Orphanage, she studied each of the smaller girls who scampered past her. There was a chubby dark-curbed mite scesawing near the tall iron gate, Mrs. Ellison noted. A lovely cherub, she thought, who would make a wonderful little daughter for a childless widow like herself. Pumping madly in one of the swings was another, brown-eyed and laughing as she herself had been at that age.

So many motherless children, herded together like livestock and perforce treated almost as such—how was one to make the great decision that would change one's own life as well as the child's for ever after today?

"Good Heavens! I'm shopping for a daughter," the tall gentle-eyed woman mused guiltily. "How inhuman! It . . . it should be the other way 'round, if only a child had vision enough to select . . ."

Her thought snapped off like a twig. Something was tugging at her skirt with timid insistence, and she peered down, startled to find a thin homely little girl looking up at her. The penetrating blue eyes were much too large for that sallow sensitive face. Two mouse-colored braids hung over narrow shoulders against the starched collar of her orphanage uniform, and the arm that reached up at Mrs. Ellison was match-thin and peppered with freckles like the face and neck.

I don't believe I've ever seen a more unattractive child, was the woman's first thought. But then the little girl smiled, and her face lighted slowly as a candle in a dark room. It was a sweet strange smile, full of wistfulness and yet the paradox of a quiet *knowledge*.

"Are you the lady my mommy sent for me?" her small voice piped. It was a timid voice, rather vague like the blue eyes, but oddly compelling for all that.

Mrs. Ellison knelt down, smiling. Her hands moved, smoothing the ratty

braids. The child wouldn't look so homely with careful attention, her thoughts veered, while she murmured aloud:

"I don't know, sweetheart. Has your mommy gone to Heaven?"

The child regarded her gravely for a moment. Then she shook her head.

"No, ma'am. My mommy comes to see me any time I want her to. She talks to me every night, an'——"

At that instant the matron hustled up, starched and puffing, a tiny frown of annoyance creasing her smooth forehead at sight of the little girl with the kneeling woman.

"Mrs. Ellison, I'm so sorry I was delayed. . . . Run along to your play, Martha dear," she commanded briskly. "Matron wants to talk to the nice lady. Run away; that's a good girl."

The visitor rose, puzzled at her tone of impatience. But the thin-faced child hesitated only a second, during which her deep blue eyes searched for something in Mrs. Ellison's expression with a solemn intensity. Then she wheeled without a word and walked slowly away toward a group of children near by. At her approach, however, they promptly turned and left her standing there, leaning against the trunk of a giant white oak that dwarfed her small body.

Mrs. Ellison watched the by-play with a queer pang. "Who is that child?" she murmured. "There's . . . there's something different about her."

"Martha?" The matron's laugh of exasperation knifed into her mood. "I'm sure you wouldn't care to take on *that* responsibility! She's really our problem child. Doesn't get on with the other children and constantly breaks our petty rules here. Oh, I don't mean she's deliberately bad, but——"

"Just a misfit?" The tall brown-haired visitor nodded her sympathy. "Perhaps it's the mother's interference. I understand from little Martha that she visits her quite often, and that's always hard on a child's morale. A pity she couldn't just take her away from here and support her the best way she——"

Mrs. Ellison broke off, conscious that the matron was smiling at her quizzically.

"My dear," the orphanage head spread her hands, "that child has no mother—she died over a year ago. Tuberculosis, I'm told, aggravated by night work in a cotton mill. I see I must explain our little Martha to you. . . .

"The poor baby had such a shock, she's never been able to adjust herself. Some minds, tortured beyond endurance, fall into amnesia as an escape. Others—like poor little Martha's—simply build up a dream-world in which they need not face the cruel truth. She has a positive fixation that her mother is beside her at all times. 'Why, I can see her in the night, can't you?' she'll say, time and again. Carries on long imaginary conversations in the ward after lights out, so that the other children complain of her keeping them awake. They don't dislike her, but I think they're a bit afraid of her."

"Afraid?" Mrs. Ellison quirked an eyebrow at the absurdity. "Why on earth should anyone be afraid of that pitiful little mine?"

The matron fidgeted, then gave a nervous laugh. "Well"—she averted



her gaze sheepishly—"well, it is odd. Some unexplainable things have happened since the child has been here at the Home with us.

"I must tell you first that Martha's mother was a remarkable woman. Physically a wreck, and morally. . . . There was no father, you understand. A drunken sailor, most probably, as the woman seems to have been a cheap dance hall hostess before her child was born in a charity hospital.

"But little Martha's birth seemed to bring out the best in her—a fierce maternal instinct. It happens often—rather proving, I think, the divinity in all mankind. Anyway, the mother changed her mode of living at once, got a job in the mill, and literally killed herself working for her child.

"She fought death with a stubborn will that prolonged her life by months, they tell me. But in the end her frail body gave way.

"At the last she called little Martha to her bedside and made the child some sort of crazy promise that she would *never leave her*, no matter what anyone said about death and the like. Her sick body was only a worn-out coat, she told the child, that her *real 'mommy'* was throwing away so that it could not hinder her any longer in taking care of her baby.

"A natural thing to say, of course, but disastrous in its effect on a child's impressionable mind. It developed a complex in Martha . . . so weirdly borne out by coincidence, however, that I . . . I sometimes catch myself wondering! Really, it's . . . it's uncanny!"

Mrs. Ellison laughed softly. She was a matter-of-fact woman, little given to fantasy. But, nettled by her skepticism, the matron gave details.

"You think I'm imagining things?" she bridled. "Listen! There was the time a certain actress wanted to adopt the child. I can't think why she chose homely little Martha—unless as a foil for her own beauty. But all was in order and Martha was being sent for, although she behaved badly and screamed all night that her 'mommy' hadn't sent this lady for her.

"With the woman's secretary waiting in our very antechamber for Martha to be dressed, we received a call from the actress's press agent saying the deal was off. It appears she was simply adopting Martha as a publicity stunt, to swing public opinion her way when a nasty scandal broke in which her name would be involved. *But that very morning she had fallen downstairs and fractured her nose!* In case the plastic surgery wasn't successful, her agent informed me, the dear lady's contract might not be renewed and 'she couldn't support a child.' We read between the lines, of course, as the actress had millions salted away. . . .

"But there it stands. Martha was saved from such an adoption because *something* tripped that cold-blooded woman and temporarily marred her looks!"

Mrs. Ellison gave another soft laugh. "A timely coincidence," she murmured. "Poor little Martha!"

"Yes," the matron nodded wryly. "But it strengthened her belief that her 'mommy' was watching over her interests night and day! As for the other children here, they're as convinced as she is . . . especially since the time that circus came to town, and our amusement fund didn't stretch over the last ten of our enrollment.

"Martha was one of those who drew lots and lost. She was heartbroken, like the other nine losers. Then suddenly, as I was lining up those who could go, little Martha ran forward and tugged at my arm.

" 'Matron! Matron!' she cried, her eyes shining with excitement. 'Mommy says I can go! Mommy says to take all the others, and she'll pay their way somehow, so I can go!'

"Of course, that outburst upset the other children and raised their hopes so, I hadn't the heart to leave them behind. I decided to borrow the difference from our food bill and juggle accounts later. A foolhardy impulse, but you'll understand how I felt.

"So off they went to the circus, every one of them. They were fairly dancing with anticipation waiting outside the big tent while I bought the tickets; but my conscience was beginning to prickle. Those ten extra tickets meant a scantier diet for all of them well into the next month's budget, and I was sure the board would discover it and give me a severe reprimand.

"I stopped short right there, thinking it over and wishing heartily that I could spank little Martha. But at that moment I . . . I happened to glance down at the sawdust.

"There just under my foot was a small wad of paper money neatly folded around some silver change. My heart almost stopped, let me tell you, when I counted it—the exact amount, to a penny, for those ten tickets! I had the local paper advertise later for its loser, but no one claimed it. I've . . . I've often speculated on the many ways it could have got there."

Mrs. Ellison's smile had faded a trifle, but now it came back, full of gentle tolerance. "Perhaps some drunken person dropped it," she suggested. "Surely, my dear matron, there's nothing supernatural about losing money on a circus ground!"

"Humph! Oh. Well . . . maybe not." The plump orphanage head looked disgruntled but unconvinced. "There were other times," she pursued stoutly. "That time, for instance, when little Martha swallowed an open safety pin, the way children will do if you don't watch them every minute!

"It was a terrible day last fall, when we had that ice storm, you remember. Wires were down, and we couldn't locate a doctor, with the poor little thing choking and crying, and that open pin jabbing into her throat with every move she'd make! I was frantic, and Miss Peebles, our resident nurse, was at her wit's end . . . when all of a sudden this interstate bus broke down, spang in front of the Home gate. . . ."

Mrs. Ellison's eyes twinkled faintly. "And I suppose," she put in, teasingly, "there was a doctor for little Martha on the bus?"

The matron did not return her smile, but surreptitiously mopped off a dew of moisture that sprang to her upper lip at the memory.

"A doctor?" she replied grimly. "There were eight—coming home from the state medical convention! One was an ear, eye, nose and throat specialist. Of course, he had that safety-pin out in a jiffy.

"What was so queer, the bus driver said it was battery trouble, with his new battery and wiring just checked carefully at the last station! Oh, it *could* happen, yes. I grant you, it *could* happen."

Mrs. Ellison chuckled. The chuckle seemed to annoy the matron, and she burst out afresh.

"There are dozens of minor incidents like that," she declared. "Martha is eternally finding things the other children will pass a hundred times. Pennies in the grass. A half-package of gum. A broken toy fire-engine, once, that some child must have thrown over the Home fence in a temper. Ask Martha where she gets them, and she'll invariably answer: 'Mommy gave it to me,' with those big eyes of hers as innocent as a lamb's. If I could her and tell her to say she found it, she'll just say: 'Oh, yes—but Mommy told me where it was.'"

"All that has made a vast impression on the other children. That's why they're a bit in awe of her—because they believe she's hourly guarded and pampered by a . . . by a——"

The matron floundered, reddening. Mrs. Ellison lifted one eyebrow humorously at the plump house-mother; saw the flush deepen in her round cheeks.

"By a ghost?" she finished, gently derisive. "My dear matron, I'm astonished that a sensible woman like yourself would permit such a silly notion to survive! Why, it's medieval!"

The orphanage head folded her lips primly. "Well," she said in a tone that defied argument, "I only say it's queer, and that's what it is! The children are afraid of Martha, and she's a problem I'm at a loss to solve. If only somebody would take her off my hands—somebody I wouldn't mind her going to, with the child's good at heart. But, there! Nobody wants the poor homely little thing, though she asks everybody who comes here if she's 'the lady her mommy sent' to adopt her. It's a crying shame—but who'd want a crazy child when there are so many normal ones to be had?"

She followed the visitor's gaze with a look of perplexity, and regarded the little girl sitting cross-legged on the ground, playing by herself while others scampered past in noisy groups.

But Mrs. Ellison was folding her gloves and putting them in her purse with the gesture of a knight drawing on his gauntlets of chain-mail. Then she faced the matron and announced:

"Who'd want her? I do! And just as soon as it can be arranged! That fixation has been nourished too long in the child's mind. But a home, some new toys and a little affection will make her forget that nonsense. So . . . if you'll just rush the formalities, I'd be ever so grateful."

The matron blinked at her, surprised for a moment, a tiny flicker of doubt burning behind her spectacles. Then she shrugged and sighed deeply.

"That I will!" was her promise. "I only hope you won't regret it, Mrs. Ellison. Frankly, I haven't been able to cope with the situation. It's . . . it's a strange case, and needs a lot of understanding. Don't be too impatient with the child."

"Nonsense!" The visitor squared her shoulders firmly. "Martha simply needs a mother." And she strode across the grounds toward the small figure playing alone under the oak tree with a handful of acorn cups.

The matron, watching her, shook her head doubtfully as Mrs. Ellison

knelt beside the child. Then, with reluctance, she turned away, for there were some two hundred other orphans who demanded her daily attention.

Little Martha looked up shyly, gravely questioning. Mrs. Ellison studied the vague sweet smile accorded her and gathered the child impulsively into her arms. But she was chagrined at the lack of response. Little Martha, not quite cold to her advance, was like a small bony doll in her embrace, neither affectionate nor defiant. One hand clutched an acorn cup with a tiny grass handle, but the other hung limp and did not steal about her neck as Mrs. Ellison had half expected. It was almost a challenge, she thought, and smiled at the absurdity.

"Martha dear," she whispered, "you are going home with me and be my little girl. I'll give you a pony and cart, and lots of dolls, and have your hair curled like that little girl over there. Would you like that?"

The blue eyes lighted, giving Martha's sallow face a certain quaint beauty for all its freckles and angularity.

"Oh, yes'm!" she breathed. "I . . . I would! But I'll have to ask Mommy first," she added shyly. "Tonight I guess maybe she'll tell me if you're the one."

"Now, now!" Mrs. Ellison laughed with an effort. "You must call me your mommy, dear, because you'll be my own little girl tomorrow!"

"Yes'm," the grave child nodded obediently, "I'll call you Mother, if Mommy says it's all right. Oh, I . . . I do hope you're the one!"

And Mrs. Ellison left, feeling baffled and entirely unsure whether or not she had won that first match.

The ponderous amount of red tape was snipped through, true to the matron's promise. A few days later, with a late autumn sun gilding the yellow leaves a brighter gold, Mrs. Ellison again drove to the Acipco County Orphanage.

She had dismissed her chauffeur, bought a woolly Scalyham pup at a pet shop en route, as well as a lovely little blue silk dress, and set forth rather grumpy. These, she thought, are my weapons. With these I will slay forever the ghost of Martha's "mommy," and she'll haunt that lonely child no longer!

An hour later, they were whirling out of the orphanage driveway—a tall gentle-eyed woman at the steering-wheel and, close beside her, a little girl in a blue dress, ecstatically hugging her new puppy.

Threading her way through the afternoon traffic, Mrs. Ellison smiled and chatted merrily, but her heart seethed. Confound that selfish hysterical woman, dying on her hospital cot! She had left a mark on this wistful credulous baby that time could not erase!

For a moment, glancing sidewise at her adopted daughter, Martha's second mother hated that first one who stood between them like an invisible wall, in spite of everything she could do.

Or, did she? Eerily Mrs. Ellison felt an alien presence in that wide car seat—but not between her and the child. Rather, it seemed that *someone . . . something . . .* was seated on the other side of little Martha, allied with her

new mother, guarding the child on one side while she herself guarded the other.

The tall woman shook herself angrily. What utter rot! Was she, too, succumbing to the child's hallucination? She must exercise that spirit now, or admit defeat by something that did not exist.

"Do you love your new mommy?" she coaxed, bending sideways to hug little Martha with one arm.

The child snuggled closer. Wide blue eyes blazed up at her, aglow with happiness. "Oh, yes, Mother! You are really and truly my mother now, aren't you? So I'll tell you a secret," as the woman's face lighted with triumph. "Mommy told me last night that she picked you out for me a long, long time ago! An' she said——"

"Martha!" Mrs. Ellison drew back sharply as from an unexpected blow. "Stop talking like that!" she commanded shortly. "I want you to forget all that nonsense about your mother. Remember and love her always, of course. But your mommy went to Heaven over a year ago, and you must stop pretending that——"

A scream from the child cut her short. Mrs. Ellison broke off, jerked her head around, and was transfixed with horror to see a huge and driverless gasoline truck hurtling down upon them from the long narrow hill they were slowly ascending.

The great red juggernaut was picking up speed. It careened from curb to curb like a drunken monster, making for their car with a blood-chilling accuracy, blunt nosed and heavy as a locomotive.

Panic swept over Mrs. Ellison, freezing her hands to the steering wheel. A few more yards, and disaster would strike them head-on with a grinding crash. It seemed to the woman that she could hear that sickening sound already . . . and there was not an alley, not a convenient driveway for them to dart into. Only a low rock wall on one side, a sloping terrace on the other. And, as though realizing the futility of further motion, the car stalled dead in the path of the runaway truck.

"Oh, darling—*jump!*" Mrs. Ellison screamed. "Jump out and run! I . . . I can't——"

But the child at her side had not even heard her. For one who faced death, she seemed strangely calm. Her sallow face had gone so pale that the freckles stood out darkly, and her grip on the new puppy tightened. But her lips moved softly in a half-prayer that was almost inaudible to the woman beside her.

"Mommy! Mom-my!" the whisper fairly screamed. "Make it stop, Mommy! *Please make it stop!*"

Mrs. Ellison tugged at the child, intent on pulling her out of the doomed car in a last wild chance at safety. But before she could wrench open the car door . . . there was a metallic squeal of stripped gears.

Looking up, wild-eyed, she saw the onrushing truck hop sideways awkwardly and come to a scraping halt against the curb—a scant five feet above them.

People came running then—frightened residents, and a policeman, and

the white-faced truck-driver. They crowded about the truck, then rushed to the stalled car where Mrs. Ellison was slumped weakly at the wheel. Beside her sat a homely little girl whose strange quiet smile caused them to look at her and look again intently.

"Jeez, lady!" the truck-driver babbled an incoherent apology. "I sure thought I had her braked steady! Jeepers, if that packing-case on the seat hadn't a-fell against the gear-shift and knocked her into reverse, you . . . you might a-been——"

Mrs. Ellison merely nodded in answer. She could not trust her voice. She could only stare in a dazed way at the truck, then shift her gaze queerly to the little girl seated beside her.

"Are . . . you quite all right, Martha dear?" she whispered after a moment. "Then, let's you and I and . . . and Mommy go along home."

# The Great Gizmo

by Gilbert Wright

*Coming events cast their shadows before—but in the case of the thinking gadget, the mechanical brain duager, the Great Gizmo in Short, let us hope we are mistaken. When we see books about cybernetics, the science of robot brains, we feel a Darwinian chill upon us and wonder if we mammalian Earth-masters are not due to meet our superior successors all too soon. "The Great Gizmo" is not, lest you be misled, exactly a gloomy story. In fact it's a delightful bit of spoofing about a professor who invented a typewriter with an added feature that so far has not been put on the market.*

B

UT I still don't get it," I said. "What is a gizmo—what's the word mean?"

The Professor turned his thick lenses my way and twiddle-fingered his goatee. "Gizmo," he piped, "is a generic term covering much the same field as gadget, gimmick, widge, thung-a-ma-bob, contraption and so on. It denotes an object of a mechanical nature having a function which, for the moment, eludes us. It therefore seemed appropriate to call this a gizmo."

"But if you've spent eighteen years inventing it, you ought to know what it's for."

"Umna. Not necessarily." The Professor smoothed his hand over the gizmo the way you will rub a dog's head. "A man can get lost in his work," he said quietly.

The gizmo looked something like a medium-sized adding machine, except that there were hundreds of tiny keys, several banks of buttons, and here and there a set of dials or a group of colored lights. It had sounds too, as I found out later. I'd happened to sit next to the Professor at Barney's Bar earlier in the evening, and we'd got to talking. He told me about inventing the gizmo, and being a promoter, I became interested. I needed a promotion.

"About six years after I began working on the principle," he continued in his mild little voice, "I had my accident. Since then the memory of what I did in the beginning has never been clear to me, and so there are features of the gizmo that remain obscure. After all, there are forty-two thousand moving parts in this machine."

"Explain it again," I asked.

He cleared his throat gently. "Consider the race-track totalizer. It automatically and infallibly does the work of a hundred accountants. It calculates

the ever-shifting public opinion on each horse, and determines the final betting odds; it deducts for overhead, breakage, political expense; it makes allowances for the condition of the track due to relative humidity, and—"

"I understand the totalizer," I interrupted. "I mean, I know there is such a thing. But according to what you told me, the gizmo does not use numbers."

"Primarily, no. The function of the gizmo is to solve situations. I have discovered through many years of study that there are only eight thousand and three situations than can befall a human being. I broke these down into one hundred and nine general classes—represented by this upper bank of keys. Now this block of buttons governs the relationship of all possible variations that—"

"Okay," I said. "Okay. I believe in the gizmo. Now, let's see it work."

"Delighted!" smiled the Professor. "Suppose I take you?"

"Maybe you will, at that," I said.

The Professor studied me. He reminded me of a costume-jewelry bug I had once bought Opal. He began murmuring to himself, poking a button or lever at each word: "Good-looking . . . athletic . . . about twenty-six . . . fair education . . . intelligent . . . six foot three . . . one hundred and eighty . . . self-confident . . . gullible—"

The gizmo began tapping a bell, and a red pin-point of light came on. The Professor frowned, looked over his set-up, then smiled and nodded. "You see," he said happily, "I introduced a contradiction by putting down both '*intelligent*' and '*gullible*'—naturally, the gizmo caught it. We'll strike out '*intelligent*.'" He did so, and the red light went off.

"Now then—" He turned to me. "What is your problem? Just talk along, and I will set up the various factors as you come to them."

"Well," I said, "I'm about broke."

"How much money have you?"

"Eight dollars and eleven cents," I replied without looking.

The Professor poked a button and set a dial. "Proceed."

"Okay. When I got out of the service, I came here to L.A. to look up Opal and find a job, so's we could be married and get a farm. Before the war we both lived in Lake City, Iowa, and I did pretty well promoting hog-calling contests around the State."

"You—call hogs?"

"Oh, no," I replied. "I haven't any talent. I just used to locate good callers, and promote contests at fairs. I've also dabbled in corn-husking bees. Opal was a farmer's daughter."

"Proceed."

"Well, I came out here and found Opal all right. But she's making a hundred and eighty dollars a week picking up dropped rivets in a war plant, and I'm pretty much out of her social sphere. I can't seem to get a job promoting anything. I can't even promote a room, though a friend lets me sleep in his coupé at the parking lot."

The Professor held up his hand, and I paused while he gave the gizmo this information. By now several colored lights were blinking, and a whirring sound was gnawing at something. He nodded at me.



"Opal is better looking than ever. She's the wholesome farm type, and makes all the girls I've seen in California look washed-out and spindly. She seems just as fond of me as ever but— Oh, I don't know. She has a swanky apartment, and there's a studio publicity man who's hanging around trying to talk her into going into the movies. She's liable to do it too, if she can better herself financially."

"I think I have the essentials now," said the Professor. "One thing more—your Social Security number?"

I gave it to him, and he set a dial. Then he looked everything over, snapped his goatee a couple of times, and pulled down a lever. There was a clash of gears, and the gizmo really came to life. Buttons popped up and down; levers clicked back and forth; lights blinked and changed colors, and a new sound started that went *poop-poop-poop, peep-peep-peep, poop-poop-poop*.

"It will take about twenty minutes," said the Professor, and reaching under the desk, brought out a bottle and some paper cups.

I didn't say much during the wait, just sipped my drink and watched the gizmo struggle with my problems. You could tell it was having a pretty hard time, because after a while it began to smell warm. But the Professor didn't seem concerned, beyond squirting a little oil in a hole. "It worked day and night for a week on the World Peace Problem," he said proudly. "This gizmo has stamina."

"Gosh! What did it say about peace?" I asked.

The Professor shrugged, "It just typed out: 'TO BE CONTINUED.'"

Suddenly the gizmo went dark and silent. Then it grunted, and a slip of paper flicked out of a slot. On it were two words: "PROMOTE CALLING."

I was pretty disgusted, and after another drink, I thanked the Professor and went to the parking lot. But as usual, I had a hard time sleeping. Only, this time I kept thinking of the gizmo and all the hard work it had put in on me. It just didn't seem possible that it would advise me to leave Opal and go back to Iowa and try to promote a hog-calling contest. Then I got to thinking that it hadn't advised any such thing. No mention of Iowa. It might mean that I ought to promote a contest right here in Hollywood. Maybe I could get some big star with a farm to back me.

Early next morning I unfolded my legs, stepped on the starter and drove my bedroom to San Fernando Valley. I finally found a field with some hogs in it, hunted up the farmer, and explained my idea. He looked at me for a while.

"Listen, son," he said. "In this day and age we don't call no hogs. Not never. Come feeding time, we carry the food out to *them*. You think I want my hogs running off two-three hundred red points every evening? Why, I got a ball and chain on all of 'em now."

I returned to town pretty downhearted. Gizmo or no gizmo, I had to get something started in my direction soon. I'd learned a lot in the Army, but when you came right down to it, I hadn't learned much I could practice in civilian life—unless somebody tried to pull a gun on me. Well, I thought I would drop in on the Professor.

He was seated at the desk, looking at the gizmo—frowning at it, in fact.

But he smiled when he saw me and asked how I was coming on. I told him about the hogs.

"Tut!" he said. "Too bad. Suppose we set the fact up and see what comes of it. The lack of hogs to call quite naturally places you in a new situation."

He punched buttons and set dials. The gizmo began clicking in a quiet sort of way, not extending itself, but busy.

"It don't seem to be straining over me the way it did yesterday," I said.

The Professor made a puzzled sound and shook his head. "Something appears to have come over it. If this were not a mere machine, one might almost fancy that it had undergone a change of attitude. If you sense what I mean."

I laughed. "That's a silly idea."

The Professor chuckled mildly, "Yes, indeed, very silly."

The gizmo grunted and out came the paper. It read: "CALLING. PROMOTE CALLING."

"Practically the same as yesterday," sighed the Professor. He thought a moment, then shook his head. "I don't understand. We have just introduced a new situation regarding the lack of hogs—"

He was interrupted by another grunt from the gizmo. "Good heavens!" exclaimed the Professor. "An afterthought!"

I pulled out the paper: "HOGS NEVER MENTIONED." "By gosh, that's true," I said. "Here I've been spraining my brain over promoting a hog-calling contest, and the gizmo never said anything about hogs. It wants me to promote a calling contest. Okay, there's a lot of things you can call. Let's see—well, dogs. Get a lot of dogs from the pound, and have a contest to see who can whistle in the most. No, not quite it. Besides, they'd all fight."

The Professor wasn't listening. He was staring at the gizmo with a faraway look in his eyes, scissoring his goatee between two fingers.

I touched his shoulder, "Hey, Prof," I said. "The gizmo knew all along that—"

He lifted his lenses. With one hand he was drumming nervously on the desk.

"Leave me alone for a time," he said quietly. . . .

Well, I hadn't solved my problem by evening, and it had cost me three twenty to get through the day. I dropped in to see Opal.

The usual flashy bunch was there, sitting around drinking and impressing each other. This Teddy Moon, the publicity man, was shining up to Opal, and she was taking it all in, bigeyed. He had her believing that, with his help, she was going to be the next great picture sensation. "Sutroesque. Eyes of arctic ice softened by the sprung warmth of the tundra and stabbed by the clean-swept beauty of a gull's wing." Stuff like that. And he was going to whip up a starring vehicle for her called, "The Viking's Bride," and so on.

I thought Opal was beautiful too, but she wasn't any gull's wing. In middle age she would be comfortably fat, like a woman ought so as to be good-natured and healthy. I thought how wonderful she would look sitting on a milking stool, lugging a bushel basket of prime corn to the stock, hanging out the wash, digging in the radish bed, chopping kindling, making biscuits

or basting a roast. That's the way I saw Opal. On a fine Iowa farm near a brook or a pond where I could get in a little fishing.

While I was dreaming over these things, an idea was tapping away in the back of my mind. I listened to it and discovered it had something to do with the radio which was going full blast. Some woman was singing, or rather she was: *Calling you-a-ho-a-a-hooooo—*

I jumped to my feet, "Calling!" I yelled. "Love-call! That's it!"

People looked at me. Opal trod on Moon in her hurry to reach my side. "Haven't you had anything to eat today?" she asked anxiously, snatching my glass.

I looked at Moon. "You and I have some business to talk over," I said. "Let's go into the kitchen."

"Now," I said, as I closed the door, "I'll begin by saying that I don't like you."

"Mutual," said Moon.

"But you're head-of-publicity in a big studio, and I'll need you sooner or later. I'll need all the publicity heads of all the studios, name bands, radio—"

"Look," he said. "Whatever it is, I'm not interested." He started for the door.

I hooked three or four fingers between the back of his neck and his shirt-collar. "Look: every studio has got two or three winsome lads they are grooming to be the heart-throb of the younger generation. Singers, get it? We'll hire the Coliseum for this contest. Around the edge of the field we'll have enclosed booths, each with a microphone and loud-speaker. Nobody will know who is in these booths or what studio is interested in him. See? And in the center of the field we'll have a thousand high-school girls.

"Okay. At the crack of a pistol, all these concealed hopefuls will begin to sing. The girls will listen; they will begin to mill around. Little groups will break away from the bunch and start for a booth, change their minds, circle around, start for another booth. There will be action, drama, suspense—and finally the whole bunch will stampede to the booth with the greatest drawing power. That guy, whoever he is, will be proven the—"

Moon suddenly sagged to the floor. Right off I saw he was not just overcome by the magnitude of my idea. So I took my fingers out of his collar and pretty soon he was breathing again. "Well, what do you think?" I asked.

"You're stark mad," he swallowed. "Suppose you do prove one guy's drawing power and make a new star. What happens to the other boys?"

"They could go into some useful line of work," I replied. "And their studios would get more young hopefuls, and then we could have a return match. Maybe take the contest right into some big place like Des Moines."

Moon couldn't see it. He gave me two or three hundred reasons why it wouldn't possibly work, and then left to see his doctor. Opal was pretty cool toward me. So I excused myself and went to the parking lot.

Late next afternoon I was standing on Hollywood Boulevard at Highland. Earlier I had stood on the Boulevard at Vine and at all the corners in between. I hadn't been to see the Professor. For my dough his gizmo hadn't a fact in forty-two thousand moving parts—just a mechanical rumor-monger.

Hollywood High had let out, and I was surrounded by a large covey of girls waiting for a car. They were chattering and squeaking and cooing, and I was amazed to see that they all had newspapers, and that all the papers were open, but not to the comics.

This struck me as odd, so I listened in and pecked over a few shoulders at the evening editions. Then I hurried to the studio that employed Mr. T. Moon.

I was lucky. He had just left the gate and was coming toward me. I took up a position in the center of the sidewalk alongside a concrete wall and waited.

"Hab," he said when he recognized me. He paused, then came on rather doubtfully.

"I see by the papers that you came around to liking my idea after all," I said.

He looked me right in the eye. "What idea?"

"Got the Coliseum hired already, they tell me."

"Oh," he said. "That. If you're referring to the singing contest—I've had it on the fire for a long time."

"As of last night in Opal's kitchen."

He looked around. There were no witnesses. "Well, so what? You can't patent an idea like that. Any smart promoter could have thought of it."

"I weigh a hundred and eighty-six," I said. "And the Army taught me how to protect my interests. I may not be able to patent my idea. But Mr. Moon, I can sure patent you, here and now. And if anything further is needed, I will patent you whenever I see you, and I will manage to see quite a lot of you."

"You're making threats," he said.

"Not at all," I replied, taking off my wrist-watch and sliding it into my pocket. "No, I'm just reading you the bill-of-fare. Will you have it *à la Judo*, or just plain American style?"

"Now, wait a minute—"

I waited.

He thought. "Well, look: Why not come in as my technical adviser? I understand you've had experience promoting contests."

"I've got a better idea," I said. "You can be my leg man. You have some useful studio contacts."

"I'll make you my assistant."

I moved him gently toward the concrete wall. "Are you my leg man?" I asked. Gently I took his right thumb in my right hand, placed my left foot on his right knee and put my left hand on his right shoulder. I firmed him slightly.

"Okay," he said quickly. "I'm your man. What do we do first?"

"First," I decided, "we will make the headquarters of the contest at my hotel."

"Good idea. That's much better than using any one studio. Keep everything impartial from the start. Where are you staying?"

"That will be your first assignment," I said. "It doesn't matter to me so long as the bod is six foot five."

"I see. I'll have the studio get you a reservation. And here—" He handed me fifty dollars. "Salary advance," he explained.

"You're not a bad guy," I said. "As long as you know who's boss."

"That's life," he said. "If it's too big to lick, be nice to it. Gee, that's a honey of an idea of yours about the contest, Chic! Let's drop in some place and talk it over."

In one wild and hectic week we were ready. And when the great day came, even the California weather was unusually good. The Coliseum was jammed by opening time. As a matter of fact, two hours before the start there were enough customers to make me a substantial down payment on the sort of farm I had in mind.

We had a dozen entries. Each had come up a cloth-covered tunnel and was in his booth. Even I didn't know who was where, and the beauty of it all was that those who lost could sneak out without being seen and claim they'd never competed. But the boy that won—a star at the conclusion of a song!

The twelve booths were arranged at equal intervals clear around the field. And exactly in the center was a beautiful red, white and blue corral so constructed that at the touch of a button the whole thing was jerked fifty feet in the air. We had fifteen hundred addicts in the corral—all dressed alike in Sloppy Joe sweaters, plaid skirts, short socks and saddle shoes. Chaperons with first aid kits and stretcher bearers stood about at strategic points. Of course, there were several camera platforms, a company of mounted police, twelve bands and all that sort of thing.

We had also set up a short three ring circus with riding, animal acts, thirty downs, and so on, to entertain the older people and give us something we could top.

Everybody knew when the preliminaries were over and there was not a sound as our master of ceremonies rode out on his white horse and asked for silence. He explained the rules of the contest and pointed out the various booths. Then he whipped out a .45 and blasted the atmosphere. The corral was wafted aloft and there stood the herd of juveniles. They widened out a little, then waited.

Another pistol-shot. From eleven booths came the voices of the singers. I tore toward the one booth that was silent, figuring the microphone had gone dead, and had just reached it when the late starter found his voice and began. And believe me he had something.

Maybe half a minute passed without anything definite happening. Then you could see that the island of girls was slowly changing from round to pear-shaped. And the stem of the pear was pointed toward the booth beside me. I couldn't make out the words of this guy's song, maybe because I was so close and directly behind the loud speaker. But his tone was enough. It had all and more than I ever heard in this kind of singing—pleading, passion, pathos. And the way he would sort of pause, break his voice, and then go on again just brought tears to your eyes.

There was a sudden roar from the crowd as the girls broke. There wasn't any jockeying around or pointing cenny-meetney muncy-mo. Every single girl

leveled out to beat the rest to this guy's booth. Then his microphone went dead.

I ducked under the curtain and ran to the booth. It was locked, but I had a key.

Well, I was surprised. The singer was a Swedish electrician who'd come to adjust the microphone. He'd been in a hurry and had got his finger caught in the hinge that regulates the tilt. Then he'd tripped and got tangled up in the wire, and the poor guy had just been lying there on the floor calling for help in Swedish.

I did what I could for him, and was wondering what on earth I was going to do next, when two men came into the booth. One was Teddy Moon and the other a nice-looking young guy I recognized as a contestant. We could hear the girls chanting: "Come out, come out, whoever you are!"

"This contestant couldn't get in," said Moon. "Fix up the place and let him sing."

"Not on your life!" I pointed to the electrician. "That's the man who gave the entertainment; he's the star."

"Do you think he can make a career for himself?" asked Moon.

I looked at the electrician. He was kind of old and tired-looking. "Can you sing?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"Okay," I said to Moon. "We'll have to have it your way." I turned to the young guy. "Bad, you're going to be a star. First money you get goes into an annuity for this electrician. Right?"

"Right," grinned the kid.

The girls outside were beginning to take down the Coliseum.

"I'd better sing 'em an encore," said the kid. He looked anxiously at the electrician. "I'd appreciate it if you'd give me the pitch. I'm sure I can imitate you if I just get a start."

I thought over the situation like lightning. Time was of the essence and besides the old guy would get a nice income for life so I choked down my scruples and stamped on his foot.

The kid listened a moment, smiled and nodded for us to leave. We scurried out, carrying the electrician between us. Then the sides of the booth came down and the girls screamed with delight at this good looking kid. He sang all afternoon right on pitch, stretcher-bearers came and went—a wonderful performance.

That evening I took Opal to see the Professor. He was seated at his desk poking away at the gizmo's buttons, throwing levers and clashing gears. It seemed to me he was being a little rough.

Thousands of paper slips already littered the floor and the gizmo smelled very warm. Another slip popped out and I read it over the Professor's shoulder: "YOU ARE A LIAR." The Professor banged out another setup and jerked the lever. "OH YEAH?" said the gizmo; then it grunted and another paper came out saying "NUTS TO YOU GRANDPA."

I touched him on the shoulder: "Professor, I'd like you to meet my wife-to-be. We owe everything to you and the gizmo."

"Ah," he said, swinging his knees. "Ah, yes." He turned back to the gizmo. "I am beginning to discover," he piped, "some of the factors I incorporated into this machine before I had my accident." He paused, shook his head, and got up. "I'm not sure that I like it," He thought a moment. "As a matter of fact," he said sharply, "I am positive that I do *not* like it!" He snatched a hammer and began battering the gizmo.

I tried to stop him, but after the first blow it was too late. There were forty-two thousand moving parts in that machine.

When he had finished, the Professor turned to us with a gentle smile. "So you are to be married? Charming. Charming." He looked about happily, located two chairs and dragged them beside his. "Well, well," he said, rubbing his hands together, "this certainly appears to be an occasion for a little celebration." Reaching under the desk, he brought out a bottle and some paper cups.

# Gray Ghouls

by Bassett Morgan

*The great unexplored areas of the globe include several quite huge islands, such as Papua, New Guinea, etc., whose interiors conceal within themselves much anthropological and ethnological lore. Bassett Morgan is apparently well acquainted with these areas, for many of that writer's stories have been located in those regions. Here is a startling and weird story of Papua, of a degenerate white trader, of frightened natives, and of beasts that were more than beasts.*

WHEN there was a job to be done, especially adventurous, entailing skilful diplomacy and undoubted peril, Tom Mansey was summoned partly because he knew Papua as well as a white man may, partly that he seemed indifferent to probable torture and death meted out by head-hunting savages to intruders in hidden empires of the hinterland.

The stout officials sat about a table viewing evidence which had promulgated fresh indignation. It had been seized from the trophies of a globe-trotting curio-hunter who parted reluctantly, indignantly from it, and spouted wrath and threats of reprisal. It was a mummied human head no larger than a man's doubled fist, beautifully cured, furnished with balls of cat's-eye chalcedony in the sockets, lips sewn in a kissing pout. The shocking feature was its abundant and flaming red hair. Nowhere in Papuasia is red hair natural to a native. The idea of a mummied head with ruddy locks threatened the fragile foothold of white civilization on those dark flanks of a land as treacherous as the panther it most resembles.

Mansey added the final note of nausea to the assemblage.

"A woman's head, I should say. Whether a white woman or not I don't know. The curing might brown the skin. This hair is silky, rather fine and waved, certainly not bleached. By the manner of lip-sewing I should say it comes from the north-shore people. I never saw nicer work."

It was uncanny, horrid, weird, to hear him enthuse over the craft of cannibalistic savages, but his remarks were crisp when they asked him to investigate the source of supply, take feasible measures to halt barter in heads, intimate to the most indomitable, hellishly cunning race of blacks that earth endures, that selling human heads to tourists was indelicate, inadvisable and immoral.



"I'd suggest right here that you'd better stop tourists buying heads. So long as they pay big money for them, the heads will be forthcoming, and since heads with Nordic-colored hair bring fatter prices, the natives will swoop down on the ports and clean out our little intrusion of white exploiters in one whirlwind of savagery run amuck. However, I'm interested. Using cat's eye quartz for eyes is a new wrinkle that shows intelligent progress in art."

Mansey crossed the room in a weighted silence and traced a forefinger on a wall-map, traversing from the Curlews south of Sarong, then to the great island of Papua marked on the north New Guinea.

"What white men or women have gone into here in the last decade and who's missing?" he asked of the company's clerk who had said least and done most to assist in the investigation. The clerk flipped pages of a book and wrote rapidly on slips of paper which he gave to Mansey.

With these data, Mansey set out with a power launch and a flock of Tonga boys in small outrigger proas hollowed from hardwood in a manner that has not changed since the sea spewed forth the South Sea Islands. Mansey was lightly armed. Weapons are small insurance against the peril of penetrating tribal villages of treacherous Papuanian black men, and he knew that where that ruddy-haired head was cured and fitted with quartz eyes, were intelligence and barbed cunning.

He had little information on which to base conjecture. Official files mentioned a Scotchman, Andrew Keith, who had gone native thirty years before, taken to the hinterland and never reappeared. Besides Andrew Keith, one other white man was in that locality to which Mansey was bound. His name was Homer Mullet, he had been a surgeon in London, got into disrepute and after a brief attempt to establish himself in Port Moresby, went north, evidently had luck with the natives and sent down frequently for drugs of surgical nature and new cases of instruments. His latest order was not more than six months old. With this meager information on possible sources of red hair Tom Mansey navigated the treacherous tide rips and cross currents and after weeks of tentative questioning located the lagoon where Homer Mullet was reported to have established himself as a sorcerer of greater magic than any native chieftain.

Leaving his Tonga boys and their proas outside, Mansey and a native launch man entered the reef jaws of white coral just when dawn turned the world pearl and the sea was shimmering opal. Across the lagoon were the triangular huts fringed with tinkling shells, a fire burning on the beach, cooking pots steaming over it and the flower-decorated savages who shouted yowls of welcome. His launch churned bubbles in water clear as air, shining like green flame. Beneath were sea gardens indescribably beautiful and menacing, tinted coral, waiving fern weeds, wide-open flanges of tridacnas that can take off a man's foot if he steps into one, pretty little fish clustering and scattering like particles of an exploding glass ball. The air was hot and moist, perfumed by flowers, thick with the stench of rotting river swamp, pungent with sea-tang, the mingled accents of Papua's breasts teeming with desire, unforgettable as the hell it transcended.

With a feeling of high adventure, Mansey sent the launch close to a crude causeway jutting between the nipa-thatched huts, knowing the yelps of painted, spear-pronged savages might change at a breath to cries of blood-lust and battle. His heart pounded with the spice of the thing and another discovery. Sitting in state near the fire, remaining seated while the savages danced and leaped in childlike frenzy, was the white man he sought.

A dozen black hands reached to help him to the landing stage. The center of a swarm of rowdy young warriors hideously glorious in necklaces of human knuckle-bones, shark's teeth, crests of Paradise plumes, he was led to the fire and an avenue cleared down which he walked to the white man who was distinctively unornamented except by flower garlands, a collar of many strands of pearls, and pearl strings looped to his midriff.

"I'm Tom Mansey," he said, "and I suppose your name is Homer Mullet. I've been a month or two finding you to have a little talk."

"Mansey," commented Mullet without rising or offering his hand, "seems to me I've seen your name on the company's notations. Set in for breakfast and make yourself comfortable. I'm pretty chief here, and as long as we agree you can sleep easy. There's turtle stewing and they've learned to cook it white-man fashion. It's good to hear English again. You haven't by any possibility some recent gramophone records, have you?"

Mansey had. He breakfasted on scraped coconut cream and turtle stew, a little fruit and remarkably good coffee and was patient while Mullet pumped and probed him for world news and port gossip.

He and Mullet ate alone. The crowd had dispersed to a farther fire and cooking pot. The women were invisible in the huts. Mansey had opportunity to observe many things, a garden of sorts for that wilderness, an almost new *lagi-lagi* house for the men, and that Mullet's abundant hair curled to his shoulders but was so dark brown as to be almost black. Otherwise the renegade surgeon was a giant in stature, growing too fat and slightly insane, which Mansey expected. No white man can fight Papua. The land gets under his skull and behind his eyes. It drugs and stultifies his morale and finally kills his soul. That had evidently happened to Mullet. But his talk was rational. Mansey saw the slender, tapering fingers always playing nervously with the pearl strands, and the shifting prominent eyes. He had been a man of character and personality, a brainy intelligence, sensual-mouthed, and his good looks spoiled by a flattened nose and indulgence which over-hampered his body.

"You'll stay a few days?" he asked.

"I'd like to," Mansey told him.

"You can have a house. Anything else?" Mullet's smile was suggestive and Mansey shook his head.

"The fact is I came for your help in halting the sale of heads to white tourists, if possible." Mansey told in detail the new menace which had leaped to formidable proportions and of the one ruddy-haired head which had started the rumpus.

"So you, knowing something of heads," said Mullet, "recognized the lip-sewing and came north. They know that I'm here, and that Sandy Keith

left his red-headed offspring in these hills, eh?"

"I suspected something of the sort. I suspected you."

This man was clever, also friendly. Mansey wanted that amiable feeling to continue and he had no hope of fooling Homer Mullet about his mission. Frankness might serve where guile would antagonize.

"You flatter me," said Mullet, laughing. "I start no line of devils down here, my friend. Besides, my hair isn't red."

"But the heads——" began Mansey. Mullet silenced him.

"I've no doubt my fellows do trade heads. They cure them. I can't stop that, but I have managed to put the fear o' God into them enough to confine their head hunting to enemies and killing them outright before they began. One thing I'll admit: there isn't a fresh one in the village. Look at the houses."

They strolled abroad and Mansey saw that the heads on display were old, rather green and misted with mold. Wooden figures carved grotesquely were plentiful. The village was clean, the houses new, there was evidence of sanitation and order unusual to natives. Yet instinct told Tom Mansey he was hot on the trail of trouble.

He was sure of it when at one hut there was a commotion and he saw a young girl struggling with older women and caught a glimpse of a head of glinting gold curled in cloudy beauty. Then amid shrieks of the women she was dragged inside and hidden. Mullet laughed.

"Bleaching a new queen," he observed. "At present I am a widower after a fashion. That shock you?"

"No." Mansey shook his head. "It isn't good for man to live alone, especially in savage lands. That new queen is a beauty."

"Six weeks in a darkened hut bleaches them like mellow ivory, and she's been kept from betel-chewing, or having her teeth filed. Making wives to order is feasible here, Mansey. Old Sandy Keith knew that."

"He is dead?" asked Mansey quickly.

"He is dead, and I inherited a lot of his troubles along with his trained apes. Sandy was quite a scientist. He was bent on learning the language of orang-outangs and had a flock of them. I have them now, nicely trained. You'll see."

Mansey was relieved at the conversational change, and puzzled. The orang-outang is a formidable simian, and he knew little about them except that they would clear the jungle in their vicinity of smaller monkeys and birds on sight. Mullet's laugh was unpleasant, yet Mansey fancied it sounded strange because laughter was not loosed in that place. He sensed a sinister secret behind this bland talk of Mullet, and he knew instinctively that he was being entertained nicely to hide that secret, as well as Mullet's almost pathetic joy in companionship of his own race and kind.

That night he watched a dance at the *laji-laji* house and the ritual of initiation of young men ripe for manhood—the ritual that would enable them to take wives and heads. It was not new to Mansey, but he hated the evident relish of Homer Mullet over the stoicism of young men enduring greatly. He watched through a haze of the final orgy, until satiated with strong

drink and blood-lust they finally dropped inert and lay like a strange harvest of death as dawn flowed over the hills and blazed on the sea.

He went to the hut they had given him, but did not sleep. The settlement was lifeless at that hour except for a few older women at their housekeeping and cooking. He thought of the girl in the bleaching hut who would be Mullet's queen, and was sorry for her, needlessly. He remembered that Mullet had said he was a widower at present, and during the dance in the *lago-lago* house he had confided drunken details of his rule and the reign of Sandy Keith.

"He lorded it, Mansey. Had several wives, and I married one of his daughters, a red-headed she-devil. She had all the beauty you'd ever find in a woman, but she was worse than native. She tried to kill me a dozen times, knives, poison, sorcery, and—"

Mullet had laughed horribly. Tom Mansey had no doubt in the world that the red-headed wife of Homer Mullet was killed, probably murdered. It was not his concern, but it sickened him. He knew that he was on the track of that forbidden traffic in heads, yet no nearer a solution of the puzzle would be presented if he tried to halt it.

That day he slept fitfully and awoke after the noon heat to find Homer Mullet stir. Hearing his voice, Mansey looked from the hut door and saw Mullet coming down the trail of white crushed coral followed closely by a huge gray shape that leped along in the way of the great apes, paws trailing at its knees, and Mullet was talking to the creature, which seemingly answered by uncouth guttural sounds.

He hailed Mansey. "Going to take a look-see at my queen. Come along?"

It seemed diplomatic to go along and Mansey came down the notched log a little on guard because of the great ape.

"Sheba won't bother you," said Homer Mullet. "She's jealous of women but not men. I've got to get her acquainted with this girl, whom, by the way, I've named Cleo, short for Cleopatra." Mullet enjoyed the joke loudly, and the great ape showed her big teeth in a wide-mouthed grin and an uncanny cackle.

"Shut up!" yelled Mullet. The effect was magical. The ape's eyes showed shame, even grief, and she hung her head, but when Mansey looked back he thought she was snarling.

When they reached the hut where the potential queen was being hatched and beautified, Sheba the ape suddenly darted and swung to its roof-peak, and no commands of Mullet would make her descend.

"All right, you jealous old she-monk, take a look-see from up there and you'll see a real beauty. Bring out the girl!" he called to the scrawny old woman who peeped from the door.

On the roof, Sheba chattered angrily as Mullet repeated the command in native. To Mansey the experiment seemed considerable of a risk. As the child appeared in the hut doorway, Sheba showed jealousy. The girl was the prettiest Mansey had ever seen, her rounded body outlined in a scarlet stain, her only covering a waist fringe of red and white blossoms.

Homer Mullet glanced at her, then beckoned to the ape on the hut roof

and commanded in lurid curses, which Sheba not only ignored but chattered back her raging resentment.

"Look here," howled Mullet, "you'll come down and behave or I'll get the whip. This girl is your master-lady, hear what I say? You'll treat her nicely and none of your tricks like last time. You had your chance, you she-devil! And you made hell for everybody. You know what happened to you then, and it'll be worse next time. I'll make a crocodile of you—understand? You know how you hate water and the muggers. Well, you behave or your next incarnation will be a mugger. Now come down and kowtow."

Mansey listened in astonishment and something of fear. The she-ape was powerful enough to tear a man limb from limb, and she was roused to fury. Her eyes shot green fire, her teeth flashed and ground on themselves. The pretty little bride was gray-skinned with terror and dropped to the ground, her golden eyes a wild appeal. Mullet had been drinking heavily all night and was still drunk. His face grew purpled, his eyes were bloodshot, the veins on his neck stood out and throbbled. But the ape defied him and in the end he snarled a command to take the girl inside and strode off, beckoning Mansey to follow to a couch by a shaded nook at the jungle edge.

There he imbibed more fermented coconut juice and gradually calmed to coherency which was no less frightful in its revelations than his exhibition of rage.

"That ape is near human. I'd say she *is* human. Old Keith made a study of them. I went him one better. I gave them brains. You saw that she was jealous, didn't you? Well, I'm afraid of her. Six months ago she killed my bride, another red-headed beauty like this one. I've got to prevent that, Mansey. Somehow I've got to keep her from this girl."

"Why not do away with the ape?" asked Mansey, more because some reply was expected than as a suggestion.

"I dare not. I've got seven of them trained, equipped with brains, thinking brains. They're my bodyguard. Without them I wouldn't last here. Oh, I know these blacks don't love me! I'm not that great a fool that I'd feel safe long. The she-apes are always near. You don't see them, but they don't let me out of their sight. I made a mistake with Sheba, though. Sheba was the name of that red-haired she-devil of a wife that tried to do me in. I remember telling you about her last night. Well, Sheba loved her red hair and beauty. She loved me too damn well. And God, how she hates being a monkey! But that was no idle threat about the muggers. I've never tried that, but I will. I'll make a crocodile of Sheba, so help me God, if she touches this new girl."

"Mullet, you're about as drunk as I've seen a man. Better quit that stuff or you'll be seeing monkeys," said Mansey.

Homer Mullet laughed long and loud.

"You don't believe that, eh? Well, I don't blame you. But didn't you hear why they did for me in London? No? Well, I'll tell you. I took the brain of a boy dying with consumption and transplanted it to the head of a half-wit homicide. And by God, I made a success of it! And did they hail me as the discoverer of a new trail in surgery, and see as I saw, a way to

empty our asylums and make use of incurables? They did not. They said I was crazy, they disgraced me. I barely escaped an asylum myself. That's why I came out here and kept my hand in. And I've done it time and time again. There was plenty of opportunity. The hanties gave me subjects for experiment, and many a head is mummied and sold whose brain is still doing excellent service in a strange body. That's what I've done."

Mansey was staring at Mullet the surgeon, who gloated over his own skill. It was unbelievable, yet except the wrath which shone in his eyes, Mullet's appearance was convincing.

"But trying the ape business was new. And possibly it was immoral. Sheba tried so many times to kill me, and one night when I was sleeping she almost got me. I struck in self-defense, stunned her and saw myself as a murderer. You may think murder a small thing to a man like me. It isn't. I've never killed. I didn't kill then. The she ape that Keith had trained and which liked me was tearing the hut to pieces when she heard the row inside, and before I could get a gun she had snatched the body of my insensible Sheba. You won't care for details of what happened. I hadn't a weapon and I grabbed a bottle of chloroform which was handy and tried to brain the ape. The bottle broke and she was deluged. It acts quickly on them, Mansey. And something seemed to crack in my brain as I saw the unconscious ape and the dying woman. Well, the ape is Sheba. Now you know. I'm a fool not to kill her, but it's gone farther than that with me. I liked Sheba. And she cared enough for me to prevent my ever taking a second wife. More than that, she has somehow communicated to the other orang-outangs her jealous guardianship.

"I can't slaughter all the apes in the jungle, and they haunt me. Sheba has managed to people the land with gray ghouls who watch me night and day. Dante never conceived the hell of torture that I'm living through, Mansey."

In the tropic heat, Homer Mullet shivered and sweat broke cold on the forehead of Tom Mansey. Through terrific repulsion overwhelming him, he found himself sorry for the man who had made his own hell with more ingenious cunning than cannibal head-hunters could have devised for him.

"Mansey, if you could tell me a way out, I'd hang these pearls on your arm. An emperor's ransom, Mansey, for a plan to rid myself of this hell and live in peace."

Mansey was silent. The avalanche of horror had come so suddenly he could not yet grasp the thing. He assured himself it was the talk of a maniac, wildly horrible, yet in spite of reason he was convinced. And sifting through the horror was the fact of those red-haired heads drifting down to be bartered. If what Mullet said should be true, he was no nearer accomplishing what he had come to do. The authorities would not believe this tale nor could he halt the barter and trade.

"What became of the—the head—of Sheba?" he asked, licking dry lips with the tip of his tongue.

"They stole it from me. And I had made a job of that head, was rolling drunk when I did most of it. I put eyes——"

"Cat's-eye quartz?" asked Mansey. Mullet nodded.

"I've got it in the boat," said Mansey. "That was the one that caused the trouble. It was nicely finished."

Mullet stared at him.

"For God's sake, hide it, Mansey. Perhaps Sheba——"

He did not finish, for swinging down from tree branches overhead, the great she-ape stood before them.

Mullet ripped out an oath and added, "You heard what I was saying, you——"

Mansey fancied he heard the sound of a guttural word of speech and he leaped to his feet, ready to run for cover. The ape regarded him a moment with her alert gaze, then reached a paw, caught his shoulder and flung him, as if he were a child, at Mullet's feet.

"Better behave, Mansey," commented Mullet. "She's heard what I said. She was old Kent's daughter, remember, and he taught all of them his own tongue. If you speak French now, we might manage——"

He looked at Mansey enquiringly. Mansey shook his head.

"Very little. I do comprehend '*sauve qui peut*,' however, and it seems appropriate to this situation."

"A fine chance," snarled Mullet, as he looked about him. Mansey's gaze followed that survey and again he felt the chill of fear. In the thick tangle of lianas and jungle growth he caught glimpses of gray shapes watching them, swinging in grotesquely airy flight from tree to tree, a company of gray apes, the formidable "men of the woods" known to the world as orang-outangs.

"My harem," was hissed from Mullet's lips. "Each one equipped with the brains of a woman I selected as a wife, sealing her doom at the hands of this she——" The epithets he applied to Sheba were unspeakably vile. Mansey looked in apprehension at Sheba, but her eyes had not changed expression. Evidently there were a good many curses of port dives and docks not included in her knowledge of English. In place of anger, the eyes held something of the love-loyalty seen in the eyes of a faithful dog for its master. She squatted beside Mullet, took his hand and stroked it with her black paw, then held it to her cheek. Mullet jerked it away with an expression of disgust, and the great ape whimpered sorrowfully.

"You see?" snarled Mullet. "Yet we must talk. How about those gramophone records? Start a row going——"

"They're in the bunch," said Mansey. "I'll get them." But when he rose, the ape caught his ankle, reaching with no apparent effort, and Mansey was jerked to the ground. Then, throwing back her head, Sheba displayed her fangs in a wide-mouthed and unmistakable grin. Mansey realized that he had walked into a trap, that only by cunning could he escape from the dread company of gray ghouls which Mullet the surgeon loosed in that jungle. Now for the first time he faced greater peril than head-hunting savages seeking trophies or glutting their unquenchable blood-lust against white intruders.

"Wait," said Mullet, then addressed the ape. "You savvy music records?" He made a circular motion with his hand and hummed a scrap of tune. "You fetchem white man proa 'longside. Savvy?"

Sheba uttered a sound from her throat and swung in swift flight through the trees. Mansey immediately scrambled to his feet and Mullet rose, but before they could take a step there was a circle of great apes hemming them in effectively. They made no attempt to touch either man, but formed a ring and marched about the two prisoners in what might have seemed a ludicrously humorous array if it had not been menacing and sinister.

"Mansey, I'm going out with you. I've got to go. God knows there isn't any other place for me—in white settlements, I mean—but I'll get to another island. They can't cross water. Oh, you can speak now! These are natives, not even very good at *beche de mer* talk. It's that devil of a Sheba who understands and communicates with the others. You heard her just now, calling them. Usually they don't come so close, but your arrival has made her suspicious, no doubt, and she doesn't want to lose me."

His laughter was mirthless and uncanny, the sound of insanity cracking in his voice. Mansey did not wonder. He felt that his own reason would not long stand the strain of this sinister surveillance. Yet what reasoning power was still uncluttered by the impasse in which he found himself, cautioned him against attempting to assist Mullet to escape. The great ape would frustrate such an attempt, he felt sure. And there was danger in releasing a madman like Mullet on any other island, he thought. Aware that his face showed reluctance, he was again frank in speech.

"Mullet, I'm of the opinion that you can't get away, and I must. I could bring help, perhaps. I'll give you my word to do what I can, but for two of us to attempt escape, especially when you have such devoted followers, is utterly futile."

"Look here, don't you fancy for a moment you and that launch will leave this lagoon without me, Mansey. You can't, you know, unless I am willing. Even if you got to the launch, the blacks in their canoes would halt you at the reef entrance. I've had enough of this. Before you came I was making the best of it. I was content enough, only that I wanted a woman. Oh, it's my own doings! Don't think I'm shifting the blame, but at that it was something stronger than my will driving my hand to that delicate operation. If they'd let me alone in London, if they'd seen the marvel of what I'd accomplished, the greatest feat of surgery in this or any other age, I wouldn't be here and this wouldn't have happened. But they drove me out, my own race and kind. And you belong to them, Mansey. I've got a grudge, not against you, but all white men. Mansey"—his voice became quieter, more confidential in tone—"what if we'd take Sheba, you and I, and tour a few countries exhibiting the greatest marvel of the age? We'd need money, and we'd make it. I've loaded it here. I couldn't go back and grub and sweat again. But we could do that——"

"Mullet, either you talk rational or——"

"What will you do? What *can* you do except put a bullet through me, and you'd loose a hell fury that would tear you bit by bit in rags. I've seen Sheba do that. Finger by finger, Mansey, toe by toe, handfuls of hair, eyelids——"

"Shut up, you beast!" cried Mansey.



"That gets you, eh? Well, it's true. And I'm your only protection. You've got to save me to escape alive."

"What about the natives?"

"Sheba is half native, remember, and she likes her own kind. They're safe. They're not only safe but invulnerable. When they go forth to take wives and heads, the gray apes go along and fight for them. It's a shambles when they leave, Mansey. It has one kick-back, though." Mullet laughed again and Mansey liked his curses better than his laughter. "The natives don't need to fight and they will in time lose their own initiative, their courage. Some day this tribe won't exist, but that won't come in time to save us."

"Listen, Mullet, suppose I go out and bring help, a revenue cruiser that will blast this village into nothingness as has been done before now. A few shells——"

"Shells won't reach the apes. You'd merely murder the blacks who aren't to blame. Besides, I've no assurance that you'd come back or send them. Who'd believe your story of human apes? And where would I be when they shelled the village? If I went to the hills, the apes would go along. If I stayed here to have them killed I'd get it. What, don't you see I couldn't even kill myself if I felt like heroics to save you, because you'd have Sheba on your neck the minute I croaked? Pretty little mess, eh, Mansey? And there is no escape in the jungles or huts, none at all except to cross the water where the apes can't follow, and you're handicapped there because the natives know just what would happen to them if I'm not here to keep Sheba pacified. I did try getting away with one of my brides in a canoe and Sheba was on watch that night. She tore a *logi-logi* to bits, jerked the men to the shore and sent them after me in canoes. Then they gave me to understand I must not try again to escape. Oh, it's a beautiful entanglement! Here's Sheba."

The great ape dropped from overhanging tree branches and in one arm she carried Mansey's gramophone case, without which he never traveled. It was further proof of the uncanny intelligence of Sheba that she had understood Mullet's command and brought the case. She squatted and deftly unfastened the buckles of leather straps binding the oil-cloth cover, fitted the handle, opened a package of records and wound the machine. In another moment the wail of *She's My Baby Doll* rose in the hot silence. An instant later Mansey shrieked laughter of hysteric abandon, for the great she-ape was swaying from one foot to another and gazing at Homer Mullet with the amorous leer of a love-sick crone. She put out a paw to take his hand, but Mullet jerked it aside, and kicked his bare foot at her chest. Lacking his hand to fondle, she seized his foot, precipitated him on his back and cuddled the foot to her breast, laying her cheek against it and foodling each toe as mothers the world over play with toes of their babies.

"Laugh, damn you," growled Mullet. "I'll show you." He spoke in native to Sheba, who reluctantly released his foot, caught Mansey in her arms and, despite his struggles, swung to the tree branches. For all her strength the weight of a fighting man cumbered her movements and she halted her flight to hold him by both arms and shake him until his teeth rattled. Then

swinging farther aloft she flung him over the crotch of a branch and dropped to earth.

From below, Mansey heard Mullet's shrieks of mirth. At that elevation he could see the village huts, the lagoon and his launch, the long reef-jaws, and ascending far down the outer beach, the smokes of fires where his Tonga boys cooked their meal. About him were the palms glittering like sabers in the sun, but the jungle was silent, bereft of the gorgeous birds of Paradise, the lorries and parakeets, the little chattering harmless monkeys. Where the great apes held court, no other jungle life lingered.

Mansey straddled the limb and considered in frantic dismay the situation in which he was placed. Reluctantly, he accepted Mullet's logic. There seemed no escape. Watching glimpses he obtained of the lagoon through swaying palms and branch plumes, he saw a dark object floating and realized with his heart racing that it was the body of his native left in charge of the boat. Evidently he had angered Sheba and she had killed him without so much as an outcry. Mansey almost envied the dead man. For the first time in his years of Papua he admitted that there were worse things than murder: far worse than the taking and curing of human heads as trade to tourists was the fitting of beast craniums with the brains of thinking humans.

Mansey looked below. The gramophone still wailed its jazz music and foolish songs. The seven great she-apes were dancing clumsily, in contrast to their lithe grace in the trees. Mullet lay prone on the mats, his naked trunk crisscrossed by strings of pearls, his arms over his eyes. Above, Mansey racked his brain to think of a plan of escape. Far off, the black crouching hills quivered in the heat, which was affecting Mansey in spite of a breeze at that elevation which did not penetrate below. He felt thirsty and faint and he knew if he should lose his grip of the tree bole, he would fall to death. His heart and blood began to pound, a throbbing which presently drummed in his ears. Then, suddenly, Tom Mansey knew he heard drums, far off, faint, inaudible to Mullet because of the grinding gramophone diligently kept going by Sheba.

Mansey knew the meaning of the drum song of Papua, rising, falling, sinister, maddening, the voice coaxed by bare hands from bladderskins stretched over human skulls, and a new fear swooped and rode his shoulders. That drum-song meant savages on the march, and it was coming nearer. He looked below and saw that the she-apes had ceased dancing and stood as if listening through the blatant jazz music to the voice of approaching peril.

In another moment, Sheba had clutched Mullet and shot him to his feet and was chattering a warning. The gramophone record died with a moan, and the drum-song rose insistent as the drone of bees, palpitant as the quivering hills. It roused sleeping natives and the huts belched savages. They poured from the *laga-lagi* where they had been sleeping off the night potations, arranging their plume crests as they leaped to earth, young men greedy for battle, eager for slaughter, grimly meticulous over their gaudy ornaments, proud of the fine blue lace of tattooing and blistered cicatrices obtained in agony.

Mullet looked up to where Mansey was hidden in the tree.

"Need help to get down?" he called. "Sheba will fetch you."

Mansey yelled a refusal and began to scramble down, but the great ape swung aloft before he had compassed more than a few feet of the descent. She caught the branch on which he was perched and bent it double, plucked him from his vantage and let the branch go. The crash as it flew back proved the tremendous strength of the beast woman, and Mansey's heart missed a beat as he was swung in flying leaps and dropped on the mats, unhurt.

"Hear those drums?" began Mullet. "That means reprisal. Now Sheba and her sisters can help my fellows defend the village." He looked at Mansey, and in the bloodshot eyes of Mullet there was a meaning Mansey tried to read because neither dared utter his thoughts in the uncanny hearing of Sheba. Mullet turned to the ape.

"Good Sheba, pretty Sheba. Go after the drums, Sheba. Show the Kauloo warriors they can't fight our fellows. Take the other girls and have a good fight, old girl." He patted her shoulder, and at that careless caress the great ape fawned on him like a grateful cur that has known only kicks and abuse.

The warriors were dressing for battle in frenzied haste. They scorned to go forth to fight or die in aught but gorgeous array. And a drum-song of their own arose, one drum after another, purring the blood-rousing tempo that stirs the heart and soul of a man, tingles in his flesh, prickles on his scalp, the primal quickening call to war. Looking at Mullet, Tom Mansey saw hope born in his eyes and thought he understood. They would be rid of the apes for a time. His own thoughts darted to the launch in the lagoon, the Tonga flotilla on the beach outside. Then as he looked seaward Mansey cursed. The Tonga boys had heard that drum-song and understood its meaning. They had no courage. They had launched their canoes, which ranged like slim dark beetles on the sun-glitter of the sea, ready to dart like arrows to safety far beyond. They hovered about the lagoon entrance evidently waiting a hail or sign from Mansey, and he was powerless to reach them.

About the cooking fire, replenished by old men, began the war dance, and old women fetched gourds of fermented coconut wine, which was swigged by the warriors, who smacked their lips loudly and leaped into new frenzy, wild contortions, a hideous Carmagnole in which the she-apes joined, sometimes jumping to catch a tree branch and swing madly, spinning in midair like gibbet-fruit. Then at a sign from the leader, the dancers fled into the jungle, and the great apes leaped to the trees. Where had been a ferocious swarm of painted savages was only the scattered fire embers and the women gathering the empty gourds.

"Now," said Mullet, "now is our chance. We've got the luck of fools. Get to the launch and start it, Mansey, and I'll get the girl. By God, I'd have given Sheba credit for more brains than she showed this time, but the gods are with us."

"Look here, you leave that girl behind, Mullet." Mansey's voice was stern.

"To be killed by the she-ape? What d'you take me for? Not much! I know what'll happen to every living human left in this village when Sheba

comes home and finds me gone. There won't be a village. There won't be anything. Mansey, but rubbish, blood-soaked earth and bits of flesh. That girl comes. And there's no time to argue. . ."

It was the one outstanding fact; they must hasten and get away. Mansey turned and ran to the landing stage where he had been swung from the launch yesterday. He shortened her painter, dropped in and whirled the wheel. Then his heart sank. The engine was dead and a glance showed him the cunning of Sheba, for she had unscrewed every nut and bolt she could find and emptied his spare gasoline. The cans glittered at the bottom of the lagoon when Mansey looked overboard. The ape had taken time to sink them, sink every spare tool and all loose gear she could find. She had even thrust the oars, carried for emergency, into the open jaws of tridacnas, which closed on them. He leaned over, and reaching into the water, wrenched on one, but not all his strength released it. His efforts broke the blade tip and the maimed oar came up in his hands. The second one was beyond his reach.

Some minutes had elapsed in his curious examination of the launch, but his brain was never so alert before. He thought he might use the maimed oar to scull the unwieldy craft, and stood up to summon the Tonga proas from beyond the reef, for the old men and women of the village were watching him covertly and muttering among themselves. Mansey remembered they did not want Mullet to escape for fear of the great apes' wrath. But they would probably not interfere with him. He faced a decision of saving his own life and leaving Mullet to a hell he had made for himself, or risking death in the attempt to release Mullet from horror. The choice was wrenched from him when he saw Mullet leap from the bleaching hut to the ground with the girl on his shoulder, and Mullet's free hand clutched a big navy revolver.

Mansey saw the reason for the gun at once, and his own small automatics were in his hands. For when they saw their erstwhile white master running like a deer for the shore, there was a piercing scream from the natives left behind the war party, and they rushed at Mullet and the girl, determined to hold him on his perilous throne.

Mansey heard the man's warning cry, then the crack of his gun as he cleared a path, shooting as he ran, crashing through the outthrust arms that would have detained him, leaving dead and dying in his wake. He had almost gained the white strip of coral beach from which the landing stage jutted over the lagoon water, when one courageous old man threw himself headlong and Mullet tripped and crashed to earth, the girl flung from his arms and curled in a heap on the coral. In another moment, Mullet was the center of a heaving, lunging mass of blacks who tried to weight him to earth.

Mansey, in the launch, heard his fists thud on flesh, heard the thud of the gun-butt used as a club, saw black and white arms thrashing like flails, then with a mighty heave Mullet was free. A triumphant yell burst from his throat and he had leaped toward the shining head of the girl who lay on the sand as she had fallen, evidently knocked unconscious. That yell died in Mullet's throat and Mansey's heart missed a beat, then raced painfully. For from the quivering plumes of trees dropped a gray ghoul shape, screaming

horribly in rage, and she flung herself at the white man and sent him spinning with a sweep of her long arm. It was Sheba!

With his brain in a whirl, Mansey realized that if he was ever to get away, it was the crucial moment. Yes, loosing the launch painter, he hesitated. Mullet lay prone on the glistening coral sand, and after a glance at him, Sheba had turned to the girl whose shining brush of curls turned slightly as if consciousness was just returning. One awful scream burst from her throat as the hand of Sheba encircled her throat, then Mansey saw her bright hair through a red mist, for he realized what was going to happen, and saw from his eye corners that Mullet had rolled to his belly on the coral and was taking aim with his gun. Mansey's thoughts darted in wild speculation. Mullet would shoot Sheba, and he need not aim for the girl unless Mullet missed the ape. Otherwise—he shuddered with horror of what would happen in another moment as the hammer of Mullet's gun clicked uselessly, and Sheba, snarling horribly, picked up the girl as if she were a rag doll.

Mansey's gun cracked twice. He felt sick, revolting with nausea, for the girl's body hung limp in the ape's paws, and on her golden skin two bright soft ribbons spurted and flowed. She was beyond pain. But Mullet was creeping soundlessly, cautiously on his belly over the coral, making for the landing stage.

Mansey loosed the painter, held the launch by his clutch of the nearest post, kept his gun aimed at the head of Sheba, trying in spite of the red mist over his sight to point for the base of her brain, afraid to risk a shot lest he should miss and she would be upon them with lightning speed.

He had time to think how marvelously the rapid-fire passing of events had shaped for this get-away. Without the sudden arrival of Sheba, the natives would have prevented their escape; and if Mansey had not insisted on bringing the girl, Sheba's attention would never have been distracted by this opportunity to glut jealous rage on her rival in the affections of Mullet. The great ape was extremely, dreadfully engrossed. Mansey tried not to see what she did, tried to believe it was a rag doll in the hands of a mischievous pet. He was bracing himself with all his will to override the violent upheaval that swept to his eyes and brain, while Mullet crept toward the launch.

Far off the drum-song was muffled, like the croon of surf on coral. Beyond the reef his Tonga boys waited. Another two minutes and Mullet would tumble into the craft. Already Mansey had braced the broken oarip against the planks to shove out. They must widen the water between themselves and Sheba. Mansey wondered, in a vague, darting thought, if orang-outangs could not swim, and remembered that before this trans-elementation the human body of Sheba was probably adept and strong in the water.

Mullet was on the landing stage. Mansey heard the planks creak, but Sheba seemed to hear nothing but her own animal snarling at the dreadful task presented her. She was almost finished. Her arm swept out and held aloft something pitiful with long bright hair which she played with and stroked. Then from far out beyond the reef one of Mansey's boys hailed his master. Mansey's whole body jerked as if his nerves were strings of a puppet snatched by a crude hand.

"Marster, Marster!"

Mullet lunged as Sheba was on her feet. The launch cartened crazily as he plunged in and Mansey heaved on the oar, then tried to propel the craft from the stern. One wild screech of baffled rage rang and echoed between the jungle-clad rocksprings, and swinging the head by its long hair, Sheba sailed through the air, flung herself from the landing stage into the water and swam after the boat.

Mullet was yelling and chattering like a madman. His gun was gone and he had seized Mansey's automatics and sent a sharp fusillade at the swimming ape. If Sheba was hit, the lead pellets did not halt her. Mansey, sculling frantically at the stern, saw her fangs bared, heard her snarl, stared in horror as his muscles cracked with the strain of propelling the tubby launch, at the long, gray, hairy ghoul which gained on them so rapidly that the boat might have been anchored for all headway they seemed to make.

A mighty lunge, and Sheba's paw caught the stern, seized the oar with which he tried to batter her off, and wrenched it from his grasp. Then Mansey threw himself on the combing as the ape's weight almost swamped them. Mullet was screaming, fighting, kicking as the paws seized him, dragged him from his clutch of the planks and hauled him, still struggling, into the sea.

For a moment there was a wild upheaval, and the clear lagoon water churned in foam that was blood-streaked. Mullet's shots had hit the she-ape, but that great body had the strength and endurance of an elephant. Yet in another moment, Mansey saw that Sheba was badly wounded, for her lips dripped redly and her eyes showed glassy.

Mullet was clasped in one arm and she tried to swim with the other. Beside the body of Mullet trailed a head with bright hair, and Mansey helpless to avert further tragedy, sick with the shock of dread, clung to the launch combing, watching Sheba suddenly cease swimming and sink beneath the lagoon water, with Mullet in her grasp.

The ripples spread in rings, the bubbles broke. Through water clear as air, Mansey saw the gray ghoul go down, feet first, with the white man still struggling futilely. Then as the hairy gray shape parted sea fern fronds until her foot touched a vantage by which she might have shot her body to the surface, there was a further commotion in the sea gardens, a violent upheaval writhing below, a line of bubbles ascending, breaking soundlessly as the souls of man and she-ape escaped.

Mansey stared. He knew. Sheba's foot had touched the tinted flesh flanges of a giant tridacna and it had closed like a steel trap. Not even in the death agony had she released her embrace of the man whom in human shape she had loved so fiercely that she took him with her to a translocation far removed from reach of those bunglers who trifle with the doors of life and death.

The hot sun blazed down on a man inert, limp as a rag, lying on the launch bottom, and presently the Tonga boys who saw the launch put out, came to investigate.

They were some weeks towing the disabled launch to port, and during

that time Tom Mansey recovered from a siege of sub-consciousness and fever in which he raved and fought a nightmare jungle peopled with gray ghouls. And when some time later he made a report to the authorities, it contained prophecy and prediction.

"It is fairly well established that wherever the white man goes, it means elimination of the savage, not by slaughter, of course. We have subtler ways. And the higher type of skill and brains you send in, the quicker you set the death-dealing forces to work among the natives. Compared with one courageous, brainy white man, cobras, crocodiles, tigers, any of the jungle terrors are simple and innocuous. I know. As regards moneyed idiots who were promoting head barter, fine them enough and jail them. Cut off the demand and you kill the supply."

They rewarded Mansey rather well for that investigation, although in the launch bottom the Tonga boys gathered a king's ransom in pearls from strands which broke as Mullet struggled to escape death. They were rather honest Tonga boys and only thieved half of the pearls to divide among themselves, but Mansey is embarrassed. Pearls belong to the throats of pretty women, but those pearls held memories too horrid to give to a nice girl, so he is waiting to trade them to curio-hunters disappointed at lack of mummied human heads.

# Venus

by Maurice Baring

*With the subtle understatement that is the special skill of many fine British writers, Maurice Baring introduces an interplanetary element into the prosaic background of an unimaginative London clerk. Your editor was attracted to this story by its odd factor of an unusual visioning, the eerie uncertainty surrounding that occurrence, and finally by the factor that always intrigues this hardened fantasy fan—the difference in handling by one not a specialist in the fantasy field.*

I

JOHN FLETCHER was an overworked minor official in a Government office. He lived a lonely life, and had done so ever since he had been a boy. At school he had mixed little with his fellow-schoolboys, and he took no interest in the things that interested them—that is to say, games.

On the other hand, although he was what is called "good at work," and did his lessons with facility and speed, he was not a literary boy, and did not care for books. He was drawn towards machinery of all kinds, and spent his spare time in dabbling in scientific experiments or in watching trains go by on the Great Western line. Once he blew off his eyebrows while making some experiment with explosive chemicals; his hands were always smudged with dark mysterious stains, and his room was like that of a medieval alchemist, littered with retorts, bottles and test-tubes. Before leaving school he invented a flying machine (heavier than air), and an unsuccessful attempt to start it on the high road caused him to be the victim of much chaff and ridicule.

When he left school he went to Oxford. His life there was as lonely as it had been at school. The dirty, untidy, ink-stained and chemical-stained little boy grew up into a tall, lank, slovenly dressed man, who kept entirely to himself not because he cherished any dislike or disdain for his fellow-creatures, but because he seemed to be entirely absorbed in his own thoughts and isolated from the world by a barrier of dreams.

He did well at Oxford, and when he went down he passed high into the Civil Service and became a clerk in a Government office. There he kept as much to himself as ever. He did his work rapidly and well, for this man,



who seemed so slovenly in his person, had an accurate mind, and was what was called a good clerk, although his incurable absent-mindedness once or twice caused him to forget certain matters of importance.

His fellow-clerks treated him as a crank and as a joke, but none of them, try as they would, could get to know him or win his confidence. They used to wonder what Fletcher did with his spare time, what were his pursuits, what were his hobbies, if he had any. They suspected that Fletcher had some hobby of an engrossing kind, since in everyday life he was like a man who is walking in his sleep, and who acts mechanically and automatically. Somewhere else, they thought, in some other circumstances, he must surely wake up and take a living interest in somebody or in something.

Yet had they followed him home to his small room in Canterbury Mansions, they would have been astonished. For when he returned from the office after a hard day's work he would do nothing more engrossing than slowly to turn over the leaves of a book in which there were elaborate drawings and diagrams of locomotives and other engines. And on Sunday he would take a train to one of the large junctions and spend the whole day in watching express trains go past, and in the evening would return again to London.

One day after he had returned from the office somewhat earlier than usual, he was telephoned for. He had no telephone in his own room, but he could use a public telephone which was attached to the building.

He went into the small box, but found on reaching the telephone that he had been cut off by the exchange. He imagined that he had been rung up by the office, so he asked to be given their number.

As he did so his eye caught an advertisement which was hung over the telephone. It was an elaborate design in black and paint, pointing out the merits of a particular kind of soap called the Venus: a classical lady, holding a looking-glass in one hand and a cake of this invaluable soap in the other, was standing in a sphere surrounded by pointed rays, which was no doubt intended to represent the most brilliant of the planets . . .

Fletcher sat down on the stool and took the receiver in his hand. As he did so he had for one second the impression that the floor underneath him gave way and that he was falling down a precipice. But before he had time to realise what was happening the sensation of falling left him; he shook himself as though he had been asleep, and for one moment a faint recollection as though of the dreams of the night twinkled in his mind, and vanished beyond all possibility of recall. He said to himself that he had a long and curious dream, and he knew that it was too late to remember what it had been about. Then he opened his eyes wide and looked round him.

He was standing on the slope of a hill. At his feet there was a green moss, very soft to tread on. It was sprinkled here and there with light red, wax-like flowers such as he had never seen before. He was standing in an open space; beneath him there was a plain covered with what seemed to be gigantic mushrooms, much taller than a man. Above him rose a mass of vegetation, and over all this was a dense, heavy, streaming cloud faintly glimmering with a white, silvery light which seemed to be beyond it.

He walked towards the vegetation, and soon found himself in the middle of a wood, or rather of a jungle. Tangled plants grew on every side; large hanging creepers with great blue flowers hung downwards. There was a profound stillness in this wood; there were no birds singing and he heard not the slightest rustle in the rich undergrowth. It was oppressively hot, and the air was full of a pungent, aromatic sweetness. He felt as though he were in a hothouse full of gardenias and stephanotis. At the same time the atmosphere of the place was pleasant to him. It was neither strange nor disagreeable. He felt at home in this green, shimmering jungle, in this hot, aromatic twilight, as though he had lived here all his life.

He walked mechanically onwards as if he were going to a definite spot of which he knew. He walked fast, but in spite of the oppressive atmosphere and the thickness of the growth he grew neither hot nor out of breath; on the contrary, he took pleasure in the motion, and the stifling, sweet air seemed to invigorate him.

He walked steadily on for over three hours, choosing his way nicely, avoiding certain places and seeking others, following a definite path and making for a definite goal. During all this time the stillness continued unbroken, nor did he meet a single living thing, either bird or beast.

After he had been walking for what seemed to him several hours, the vegetation grew thinner, the jungle less dense, and from a more or less open space in it he seemed to discern what might have been a mountain entirely submerged in a mass of heavy grey cloud. He sat down on the green stuff which was like grass and yet was not grass, at the edge of the open space when he got this view, and quite naturally he picked from the boughs of an overhanging tree a large, red, juicy fruit, and ate it. Then he said to himself, he knew not why, that he must not waste time, but must be moving on.

He took a path to the right of him, and descended the sloping jungle with big, buoyant strides, almost running; he knew the way as though he had been down that path a thousand times. He knew that in a few moments he would reach a whole hanging garden of red flowers, and he knew that when he had reached this he must again turn to the right. It was as he thought: the red flowers came soon into sight. He turned sharply, and through the thinning greenery he caught sight of an open plain where more mushrooms grew. But the plain was as yet a great way off, and the mushrooms seemed quite small.

"I shall get there in time," he said to himself, and walked steadily on, looking neither to the right nor to the left. It was evening by the time he reached the edge of the plain: everything was growing dark. The endless vapours and the high banks of cloud in which the whole of this world was sunk grew dimmer and dimmer.

In front of him was an empty level space, and about two miles further on the huge mushrooms stood out, tall and wide, like the monuments of some prehistoric age. And underneath them on the soft carpet there seemed to move a myriad vague and shadowy forms.

"I shall get there in time," he thought. He walked on for another half-hour,

and by this time the tall mushrooms were quite close to him, and he could see moving underneath them, distinctly now, green, living creatures like huge caterpillars, with glowing eyes. They moved slowly and did not seem to interfere with each other in any way. Farther off, and beyond them, there was a broad and endless plain of high green stalks like ears of green wheat or millet, only taller and thinner.

He ran on, and now at his very feet, right in front of him, the green caterpillars were moving. They were as big as leopards. As he drew nearer they seemed to make way for him, and to gather themselves into groups under the thick stems of the mushrooms. He walked along the pathway they made for him, under the shadow of the broad, sunshade-like roofs of these gigantic growths.

It was almost dark now, yet he had no doubt or difficulty as to finding his way. He was making for the green plain beyond. The ground was dense with caterpillars; they were as plentiful as ants in an ant's nest, and yet they never seemed to interfere with each other or with him; they instinctively made way for him, nor did they appear to notice him in any way. He felt neither surprise nor wonder at their presence.

It grew quite dark; the only lights which were in this world came from the twinkling eyes of the moving figures, which shone like little stars. The night was no whit cooler than the day. The atmosphere was as steamy, as dense, and as aromatic as before. He walked on and on, feeling no trace of fatigue or hunger, and every now and then he said to himself, "I shall be there in time." The plain was flat and level, and covered the whole way with mushrooms, whose roofs met and shut out from him the sight of the dark sky.

At last he came to the end of the plain of mushrooms and reached the high green stalks he had been making for. Beyond the dark clouds a silver glimmer had begun once more to show itself. "I am just in time," he said to himself, "the night is over, the sun is rising."

At that moment there was a great whirl in the air, and from out of the green stalks rose a flight of millions and millions of enormous broad-winged butterflies of every hue and description—silver, gold, purple, brown, and blue. Some with dark and velvety wings like the Purple Emperor, or the Red Admiral, others diaphanous and iridescent dragon-flies. Others again like vast, soft and silvery moths. They rose from every part of that green plain of stalks, they filled the sky, and then soared upwards and disappeared into the silvery cloudland.

Fletcher was about to leap forward when he heard a voice in his ear saying: "Are you 6493 Victoria? You are talking to the Home Office."

## II

As soon as Fletcher heard the voice of the office messenger through the telephone, he instantly realised his surroundings, and the strange experience he had just gone through, which had seemed so long and which in reality

had been so brief, left little more impression on him than that which remains with a man who has been immersed in a brown study or who has been staring at something, say a poster in the street, and has not noticed the passage of time.

The next day he returned to his work at the office, and his fellow-clerks, during the whole of the next week, noticed that he was more zealous and more painstaking than ever.

On the other hand, his periodical fits of abstraction grew more frequent and more pronounced. On one occasion he took a paper to the Head of the Department for signature, and after it had been signed, instead of removing it from the table, he remained staring in front of him, and it was not until the Head of the Department had called him three times loudly by name that he took any notice and regained possession of his faculties.

As these fits of absentmindedness grew to be somewhat severely commented on, he consulted a doctor, who told him that what he needed was change of air, and advised him to spend his Sundays at Brighton or at some other bracing and exhilarating spot. Fletcher did not take the doctor's advice, but continued spending his spare time as he did before—that is to say, in going to some big junction and watching the express trains go by all day long.

One day while he was thus employed—it was Sunday, in August of 19—, when the Egyptian Exhibition was attracting great crowds of visitors—and sitting, as was his habit, on a bench on the center platform of Slough Station, he noticed an Indian pacing up and down the platform, who every now and then stopped and regarded him with peculiar interest, hesitating as though he wished to speak to him.

Presently the Indian came and sat down on the same bench, and after having sat there in silence for some minutes he at last made a remark about the heat.

"Yes," said Fletcher, "it is trying, especially for people like myself, who have to remain in London during these months."

"You are in an office, no doubt," said the Indian.

"Yes," said Fletcher.

"And you are no doubt hard worked."

"Our hours are not long," Fletcher replied, "and I should not complain of overwork if I did not happen to suffer from—well, I don't know what it is, but I suppose they would call it nerves."

"Yes," said the Indian, "I could see that by your eyes."

"I am a prey to sudden fits of abstractions," said Fletcher; "they are growing upon me. Sometimes in the office I forget where I am altogether for a space of about two or three minutes; people are beginning to notice it and to talk about it. I have been to a doctor, and he said I needed a change of air. I shall have my leave in about a month's time, and then perhaps I shall get some change of air, but I doubt if it will do me any good. But these fits are annoying, and once something quite uncanny seemed to happen to me."

The Indian showed great interest and asked him further details concerning this strange experience, and Fletcher told him all that he could recall—

for the memory of it was already dimmed—of what happened when he had telephoned that night.

The Indian was thoughtful for a while after hearing this tale. At last he said, "I am not a doctor, I am not even what you call a quack doctor—I am a mere conjurer, and I gain my living by conjuring tricks and fortune-telling at the exhibition which is going on in London. But although I am a poor man and an ignorant man, I have an inkling, a few sparks in me of the ancient knowledge, and I know what is the matter with you."

"What is it?" asked Fletcher.

"You have the power or something has the power," said the Indian, "of detaching you from your actual body, and your astral body has been in another planet. By your description I think it must be the planet Venus. It may happen to you again, and for a longer period—for a very much longer period."

"Is there anything I can do to prevent it?" asked Fletcher.

"Nothing," said the Indian. "You can try a change of air if you like, but," he said with a smile, "I do not think it will do you much good."

At that moment a train came in, and the Indian said good-bye and jumped into it.

On the next day, which was Monday, when Fletcher got to the office, it was necessary for him to use the telephone.

No sooner had he taken off the receiver than he vividly recalled the minute details of the evening he had telephoned, when the strange experience had come to him. The advertisement of Venus soap that had hung in the telephone box in his house appeared distinctly before him, and as he thought of that he once more experienced a falling sensation which lasted only a fraction of a second, and rubbing his eyes he awoke to find himself in the tepid atmosphere of a green and humid world.

This time he was not near the wood, but on the seashore. In front of him was a grey sea, smooth as oil and clouded with steaming vapours, and behind him the wide green plain stretched into a cloudy distance. He could discern, faint on the far-off horizon, the shadowy forms of the gigantic mushrooms which he knew; and on the level plain, which reached the sea beach, but not so far off as the mushrooms, he could plainly see the huge green caterpillars moving slowly and lazily in an endless herd.

The sea was breaking on the sand with a faint moan. But almost at once he became aware of another sound, which come he knew not whence, and which was familiar to him. It was a low whistling noise, and it seemed to come from the sky.

At that moment Fletcher was seized by an unaccountable panic. He was afraid of something; he did not know what it was, but he knew, he felt absolutely certain, that some danger, no vague calamity, no distant misfortune, but some definite physical danger was hanging over him and quite close to him—something from which it would be necessary to run away, and to run fast in order to save his life. And yet there was no sign of danger visible, for in front of him was the motionless oily sea, and behind him was the empty and silent plain.

It was then he noticed that the caterpillars were fast disappearing, as if into the earth: he was too far off to make out how. He began to run along the coast. He ran as fast as he could, but he dared not look round. He ran back from the coast along the plain, from which a white mist was rising. By that time every single caterpillar had disappeared. The whistling noise continued and grew louder.

At last he reached the wood and bounded on, trampling down long trailing grasses and tangled weeds through the thick, muggy gloom of those endless aisles of jungle. He came to a somewhat open space where there was the trunk of a tree larger than the others; it stood by itself and disappeared into the tangle of creepers above. He thought he would climb the tree, but the trunk was too wide, and his efforts failed. He stood by the tree trembling and panting with fear. He could not hear a sound, but he felt that the danger, whatever it was, was at hand.

It grew darker and darker. It was night in the forest. He stood paralyzed with terror; he felt as though bound hand and foot, but there was nothing to be done except to wait until his invisible enemy should choose to inflict his will on him and achieve his doom. And yet the agony of this suspense was so terrible that he felt that it lasted much longer something must inevitably break inside him . . . and just as he was thinking that eternity could not be, unconsciousness came over him. He woke from this state to find himself face to face with one of the office messengers, who said to him that he had been given his number two or three times but had taken no notice of it.

Fletcher executed his commission and then went upstairs to his office. His fellow clerks at once asked what had happened to him, for he was looking white.

He said that he had a headache and was not feeling quite himself, but made no further explanation.

This last experience changed the whole tenor of his life. When fits of abstraction had occurred to him before he had not troubled about them, and after his first strange experience he had felt only vaguely interested; but now it was a different matter. He was consumed with dread lest the thing should occur again.

He did not want to get back to that green world and that oily sea; he did not want to hear the whistling noise, nor to be pursued by an invisible enemy. So much did the dread of this weigh on him that he refused to go to the telephone lest the act of telephoning should set alight in his mind the train of associations and bring his thoughts back to his dreadful experience.

Shortly after this he went for leave, and following the doctor's advice he spent it by the sea. During all this time he was perfectly well, and was not once troubled by his curious fits. He returned to London in the autumn refreshed and well.

On the first day that he went to the office, a friend of his telephoned to him. When he was told that the line was being held for him he hesitated, but at last he went down to the telephone office.

He remained away twenty minutes. Finally his prolonged absence was noticed, and he was sent for. He was found in the telephone room stiff and unconscious, having fallen forward on the telephone desk. His face was quite white, and his eyes wide open and glazed with an expression of piteous and harrowing terror. When they tried to revive him their efforts were in vain. A doctor was sent for, and he said that Fletcher had died of heart disease.

# Ship-in-a-Bottle

by P. Schuyler Miller

*The question is, of course, just how do they get those full-rigged sailing ships into the bottles? This story by P. Schuyler Miller does not propose to answer that question, but it does deal with one of those mysterious objects that must certainly have been made by an even more unorthodox mage than that used by ship-in-a-bottle manufacturers. Readers familiar with A. Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar" may remember that that famous novel also took as its starting point a ship in a sort of bottle. We suspect that both ships, Merritt's and Miller's, must surely have been launched from the same magical shipwrights' yards.*



REMEMBERED the place at once.

I was nearly ten when I first saw it. I was with my father, on one of our exploring trips into the old part of town, down by the river. In his own boyhood it had still been a respectable if run-down district of small shops and rickety old frame houses. He had worked there for a ship chandler until he had money enough to go to college, and on our rambles we would often meet old men and draggled, slatternly women who remembered him. Many is the Saturday afternoon I have spent in the dark corner of some fly-blown bar, a violently colored soft drink untouched in the thick mug before me, while I listened to the entrancing flow of memories these strange acquaintances could draw up out of my father's past.

It was on one of these excursions, shortly before my tenth birthday, that we came upon a street which even he had never seen before. It was little more than a slit between two crumbling warehouses, with a dim gas-lamp halfway down its crooked length. It came out, as we discovered, near the end of the alley which runs behind the Portuguese section along Walnut Street. One side was a solid brick wall, warehouse joined to warehouse for perhaps a hundred yards. On the other was a narrow sidewalk of cracked flagstones, and the windows of a row of shabby shops, most of them empty.

We might have passed it, for we were on our way to the little triangular plot of grass under the old chestnut, where Grand and Beckman come down to the river, and the chess-players meet to squabble amicably over their pipes and their beer of a Saturday night. But as we passed its river end the lamp came on, and its sudden glow in the depths of that black crevice caught my



eye. I pulled at my father's coat, and we stopped to look. I wonder now, sometimes, how and by whom that lamp was lit.

The shop door was directly under the light. We might not have seen it otherwise, although I have a feeling it was meant to be seen. Even in the dark it would have had a way of standing out. The flaps in front of its door were clean, and the little square panes in its low front window shone. It had a scrubbed look, which grew even more apparent as we hurried toward it past the broken stoops and dingy plate glass of its neighbors.

It was my discovery, and by the rules of the game I was the first to open the door. But I stopped first to look at it, for it was a strange place to find in those surroundings. The street was old, but most of the buildings dated from the turn of the century, before the warehouses had gone up. They had the sooty straightness of the mauve era, corrupted now by the dry rot of poverty and neglect, but this place had a jolly brown look about it that went straight back into my picture-memories of Dickens' London. It was like the stern of a galleon crowded between grimy barges. Its window, as I have said, was low and wide with many little square panes of heavy greenish glass set in lead. The flagstones in front of it were spotless, and the granite curbing with its carved numerals and even the cobbles out to the center of the lane had been scrubbed until they shone.

That, as we saw it first, was Number 52 Manderly Lane.

The street-lamp shone down on its doorstep, but a warmer, mellow light was shining through the wavery old glass of its queer window. I think it was the first oil light that I had ever seen. I know I pressed my nose against the clearest of the little panes to peer inside before I opened the great oaken door. And what I saw was enchantment.

In the four years since my mother died and my aunt came to live with us, I had sat with my father in many a grimy little shop on these squalid back streets, and their dirt and stench and meanness no longer concerned me. I had come to expect it and to understand it. It was a part of the setting in which these pinched and tired people lived out their lives. A few of them had come up in the world, as he had, chiefly through political maneuvering or other even more questionable methods, but not many of them had lost the lean, wolfish look of hunger and suspicion which had become a part of them, ingrained as children and nurtured in youth. Those who had it least were among my father's warmest friends.

But this place was different. That was fairy. It was the Old Curiosity Shop—it was the shop of Stockton's Magic Egg—it was all the wonderful places I had found in the dark old books in my father's library, rolled up into one and brought alive. It was deep, and broader than seemed possible from outside, with a wide oak counter running from front to back along the left hand side, and a great dim tapestry, full of rich color and magic life, hung on the right hand wall next the door.

The floor was of wide pine planks, sanded white. The ceiling was low and ribbed with heavy beams. And the scent of pine and oak were part of the wonderful rich odor which welled up around me as I opened the big door and stepped inside.

It was a faery odor as the shop was a faery shop. It had all the spices of the Orient in it, and sandalwood, and myrrh. It had mint and thyme and lavender. It had worn leather and burnished copper, and the sharp, clean smell of bright steel. It had things a boy of nine could remember only from his dreams.

Behind the broad counter were cupboards with small-paned glass doors through which I could dimly make out more wonders than were heaped upon the worn red oak. Three ship's lamps hung from the ceiling, and their yellow light and the light of a thick candle which stood in a huge hammered iron stick on the counter, were all that lighted the place. Their mellow glow flowed over the sleek bales of heavy silk and swatches of brocade and crimson velvet, picking out the fantastic patterns of deep-piled carpets heaped against the wall under the tapestry, and caressing the smooth curves of gloriously shaped porcelains in ox-blood and deep jade. They half hid, half showed me the infinite marvels of an intricately carved screen in ebony and ivory which closed off the rear of the store, and the grotesque drollery of the figures on a massive chest which stood before it, of a family of trollish marionettes dangling against it, and of a set of chessmen which stood, set out for play, on a little taboret of inlay and enamel.

These chessmen my father saw, and went to them at once while I was still moving in sheer wonder from one thing to another, drawing the scent of the place into my lungs, letting my hungry fingers stay over all the strangeness spread out for their enchantment. The men were of ivory, black and red, and of Persian workmanship. I have them yet, and men who should know say that they are very old and fine.

Have I said that as I pushed open the great door a silver bell tinkled somewhere in the depths of the shop? I forgot it at once in the marvels of the place, so it was with a thrill almost of panic that I realized that the proprietor was watching us.

I don't know what I had imagined he would be like. A wizened dwarf, perhaps, wracked over with the years and full of memories. A sleek Eurasian or a Chinese with a beautiful half-caste girl for his slave. Or a bearded gnome of a man as jolly as his shop front and as full of sly magic as its interior. We read much the same sort of thing then that children do now, although my taste in melodrama may have been a bit old-fashioned.

Instead this was a huge man, a brown man with the puckered line of an old scar slashing across his throat and cheek, a man weathered by sea and wind, who would make two of my father and have room enough left for a boy as big as myself. He was of uncertain age—not old certainly, for his shock of hair was wiry and black, and not young either—and dressed in sun-bleached clothes with a pair of rope sandals on his bare feet.

My father looked him over, sizing him up as I had seen him gauge other strangers in these parts before opening conversation. He was satisfied, apparently, for he inquired the price of the chessmen and in doing so brought another surprise.

I suppose that I expected a rolling bass from so big a man—a man so obviously a sailor, and one who from his bearing had been an officer, accus-

tomed to bellowing his commands above the roar of wind and sea. But it was small and soft and rasping, as if he had swallowed it and could not bring it up again. It made my backbone creep.

"They are not for sale," he whispered.

I had heard that gambat used before, and was rather surprised when my father did not follow it up in the traditional way, but he turned instead to survey the contents of the counter and the shelves behind it. The shopkeeper lifted the iron candlestick and followed as he stooped to examine a curious footstool made from an elephant's foot, or fingered a creamy hit of lace.

"The boy has a birthday soon," my father said casually. I was listening, you may be sure, with all my ears. "Perhaps you have something that he'll like."

The man looked at me. He had black eyes—hard eyes, like some of the bits of carved stone on his shelves. His face was cut by hard lines that made deep-bitten gutters from his hooked nose to the corners of his wide, crooked mouth. But his voice was as soft and rustling as his own fine silk.

"Let him look for himself," he said. "Here's a candle for him. And while he looks I'll play you for the men."

If my father was startled, he never showed it. He had learned control of his face and tongue as he had been taught control of his quick, hard body, of necessity and long ago in these very streets. "Good," he said, and drew from his vest pocket the gold piece he carried for luck. It was a Greek coin, I think, or even older. "Call for white."

The coin spun in the lamplight, and I heard the man's half-whisper: "Heads." It fell on the wooden floor, and my father let him pick it up. "Heads," he said softly, "but I have a liking for the black."

They drew up chairs beside the little table, and I on my part soon forgot them in the wonders which the candlelight revealed. I stood for a long time, I remember, examining the tapestry which stretched all the length of the farther wall—its fabric darkened by age, but full of life and color depicting a history of a mythology which I could not and still cannot place. I grew tired of it, and had a moment's fright as I caught the empty eyes of a row of looting masks watching me from the rafters above it, then I turned back to the clutter on the long counter and began to rummage through it for whatever I might find. The cupboards tempted me, but it was with a queer sensation that I heard the proprietor's husky voice: "Go on, boy—open them."

It was a long game, I think. I was so full of the strangeness of everything, and so desirous of making exactly the right choice in all that mass of untold wonders, that I might never in my life have decided what thing I wanted most. And then I found the ship.

I am sure now it was chance—pure chance—or if it was fate, a fate more far-reaching than anything we know. I had opened cupboard after cupboard, holding the heavy candlestick high to see or setting it down on the counter behind me to fiddle and explore. There were deep drawers under the cupboards, and more under the counter, and I hunted through those, finding new wonders every moment—trays in which gaudy butterflies had been inked in tropic woods, trinkets of gold so soft and fine that I could scar it with my

nail, jewels of a hundred sorts, and the mummies of strange small animals. One cupboard seemed to stick, and when I pulled it open the whole wall came with it, leaving a paneled niche almost five feet deep. In it, set in an iron cradle, was a great glass bottle—a perfect sphere of thin green glass—and in it was the ship.

It was an old ship, a square-rigger, perfect in every detail. Most ship models that I had seen in the waterfront shops were small and rather crude, stuffed into rum bottles or casual flasks which had happened to come the maker's way, with more ingenuity than pride of craftsmanship. This ship was different. Where the routine ship-in-a-bottle howled along under full sail, heeling a bit with the force of the imaginary gale that stretched its starched or varnished canvas, this ship lay becalmed with her sails slack and the sun beating down on her naked decks. There was not a ripple in the glassy sea in which she lay. The tiny figures of seamen, no bigger than the nail of my little finger, stood morosely at their tasks, and on the bridge a midget captain stared up at me and shook in my face a threatening arm which ended in a tiny, shining hook.

I knew then that I wanted that ship more than I had ever wanted anything in all my life before. It wasn't the flawless craftsmanship of the thing, or the cunning art which had sealed it within that seemingly flawless globe of glass. It was because—and I say this after thirty years—it was because I had deep in my child's soul the conviction that this ship was somehow real, that she sailed somewhere in a real sea, and that if only she were mine I could somehow find a way of getting aboard her and sailing away to adventures beyond the dreams of any boy in all the world.

I turned to call my father. The game was over, and he stood, an oddly thoughtful expression on his lean face, staring down at the final pattern of men. For he had won. The chessmen were his. But the shopkeeper was looking not at him but at me, and although the light was behind him I did not like at all what I thought was in his face.

I stepped quickly backward. The candle tilted and hot grease splashed my wrist. I think my elbow hit the open cupboard door as I jerked it back, for I felt it give and heard it close. Then with tigerish speed the brown man was across the shop, leaning across the counter. He pulled it open—and there was no ship there.

I thought there was a threat in his strange hushed voice. "Well, boy," he whispered, "your father's beaten me. What do you want?"

I set the candle down between us and backed away. I wanted nothing more at that moment than to get out into the street again, where there were lights and people and my father. All the wonder of the place was swept away in an emotion that was as much guilt as fear, as though I had pried into forbidden things—for that was in his voice.

"N nothing, sir," I told him. "Nnothing at all."

"Nothing?" It was my father. "Nonsense, Tom. Don't be a fool. This is a wonderful place. I've done this gentleman out of some very valuable chessmen, and we must give him his chance at us. Now—what do you want?"

It was queer how his being there changed everything. There was no more

fear and there was no reason at all for feeling guilty. A kind of defiance grew up in me in their stead, and I looked straight into those hard black eyes and answered.

"I'd like a ship, I think—a ship in a bottle."

That's almost all, except that I got a ship. I had asked for one, and my father, feeling rather odd at having won so valuable a prize, insisted that I choose. I made a long business of it, hunting all the shelves and through all the cupboards, and at last I chose a frigate that as I realize now was a masterpiece for all its lifeless, straining sails and plaster wake. But there was no becalmed clipper with sun-drenched crew, hung in a green bubble as broad as my arms could span. And for a good many years, after we had moved to another town and I had found a new school and new friends, and eventually work, I wondered why . . .

I knew the street at once when I saw it again.

I had been looking for it, as a matter of fact—not actively, but in a casual sort of way as I walked the old streets along which I had trotted with my father thirty years before. They still played chess of a summer night in the little park where Beckman meets the river, but the players I had known were gone. People in those parts do not forget so easily, though, and I bought a drink here, and two or three in another place, and talked of old times and agreed that the new ones were decadent and drab. It was near midnight of a glorious night full of stars, so I turned naturally to the river front and strolled along the empty street with only my shadow for company, listening to the slow echo of my footsteps and thinking of nothing at all but the night.

The street lamp threw a band of light across my way, a little brighter than the starlight. At the same moment I stepped down from the curb and felt uneven cobbles underfoot, and somehow the two combined to break through my reverie and bring a memory up through the veil of years. I looked up, and it was there.

In thirty years the lane had grown dingier and darker, and the patch of scrubbed flagging stood out even brighter than it had that night when I was nearly ten. One of the warehouses had burned some years before, and the brick escarpment which walled the alley on the left was crumbling and broken with the black bones of charred timbers standing up against the night. The houses I passed were dead and hoarded up; the shop fronts were broken, and the doors of three or four sagged open. But as I came to Number 52 it was as though nothing had changed. Nothing—in thirty years.

There was the same big window of heavy leaded panes so old and flawed that it was hard to see through them. There was the same mellow lamplight shining out into the street, and the same great door with its massive iron latch. And as I had thirty years before, I opened it and stepped into the shop.

The little bell tinkled as the door opened—a silver bell, it seemed, deep inside the shop. My footsteps rang on the scrubbed pine floor, and the light of the three ship's lamps shone on the great tapestry that covered the right-hand wall, and on the counter and the cupboards to the left.

Under the center lamp, close beside the counter, was a little table of inlay and red enamel, and on it were a chessboard and men—ivory, black and red.

I looked up from them, as I had thirty years before, and he stood there.

I think he knew me. I resemble my father, and it may have been that, but I think he knew me. As it happens I am not my father, and the game we played that night was a very different one.

"You are looking for something, sir?" It was the same soft voice, small and husky, trapped in his scarred throat. I had heard it often in my dreams during those thirty years. And he was the same, even to the clothes he wore. I could swear to it.

He repeated his question, and it was as though those thirty years had dissolved and it was a boy of nine going on ten who stood half frightened, half defiant, and answered him: "I'd like to see a ship, I think. A ship in a bottle."

He might have been carved out of wood like one of his own fetishes. But his voice was not quite so soft and ingratiating as I remembered it. "I am sorry, sir. We have no ships."

I had changed the opening of the game, and the play was changing too. Very well; it was my move. "I'll look around, if you don't mind. I may see something that I like."

He took up the iron candlestick from the counter beside the little table. It looked smaller than I remembered, but then I had been smaller thirty years before. "Do you play chess, sir?" he inquired softly. "I have some very unusual men here—very old. Very fine. Will you look at them?"

There seemed to be a kind of pressure in the atmosphere, a web of intangible forces gathering round me, trying to push me back into the pattern of a generation before. I found myself standing over the table, holding one of the ivory men. So far as I could tell they were identical with those my father had won. I had them still at home, all but one knight which had been lost.

"Thank you," I said. "I have a very fine set of my own—much like these of yours. They are Persian, I've been told."

I am not sure that he heard me. He stood holding the candlestick over his head, watching my face with those stony eyes. "I will play you for these men," he whispered.

"You must be confident," I said. "They are valuable."

He tried to smile, a quick grimace of that hard, thin mouth and a puckering of the scar across his jaw. "I trust my skill, sir," he replied. "Will you risk yours?"

I looked at him then, long and hard. That square brown face was no older than it had been thirty years before; the eyes were as bright and hard and—ageless. I began to wonder then, as I think my father wondered suddenly as he rose the winner, what might be my forfeit if I should lose. But it was the defiant boy of ten who blurted out: "Yes—I'll play you. But not for these chessmen. I'll play you for a ship."

"There is no ship here," he repeated. "But if there is something else . . . ?"

"I'll see," I said. I turned to the counter and glanced over the hodge-podge of curios which littered it. They were less wonderful than they had seemed to a child who was not quite ten, trash mingled with fine workmanship and beautiful materials. I opened the door of a cupboard, and it seemed to me that the objects on the shelves were exactly as I had replaced them thirty

years before. I pulled open a drawer, and the same colors and patterns of grotesque shells and gaudy butterflies came welling up in my memory.

I turned to him then and took the iron candlestick. It seemed to complete a kind of circuit in me—to drop a missing piece into the jigsaw that was shaping in my mind. Time melted away around me, and I was moving down the line of cupboards, opening one after another, touching the things in them quickly with my fingers as I held the candle high. This time the brown man was close beside me. And then I knew suddenly that this was it. I tugged at the cupboard door, and it stuck. I tugged again, and I thought that he had stopped breathing. And then something—chance, was it, or a kind of fate?—something gave me the trick, the little twist to the handle as I pulled, and the cupboard swung out on noiseless hinges exposing the alcove—and the ship.

It was the same—and it was not the same. The listless sails seemed browner and some of them were furled as though the captain had given up hope of wind. The deck was bleached whiter by the tropic sun, and the paint had chipped and blistered on the trim hull. The garments which the tory crewmen wore were worn and shabby, and there were fewer men than I remembered. But the midget captain stood on his bridge as he had stood thirty years before, eyes fixed grimly on the empty sky, staring at me and through me. This time his hands were clasped behind his back, left fist clasped on his right wrist just above the shining hook. This time he seemed a little less erect, a little older than before.

I had a firm grip on the iron candlestick as I turned to the proprietor, for I did not like what was in his face. It was gone in an instant. "I had forgotten this, sir," he said. "I will play."

And then it seemed that there was another hand on mine, pushing my fingers down into the pocket of my vest, bringing out the same uneven little disc of gold which my father had tossed to call the play on another night.

His eyes went down to it, then back to mine. "If you are agreeable, sir," he said, "I am accustomed to the black."

I am not a great player, or even a very good one. As I set out the red men on the squares of the board, the same question rose again in the back of my mind. What was the price of my defeat? What was the prize he coveted, which I could give him—him, whose choice was always black?

I think that two of us played the white game that night. I think he knew it, for his seamed brown face was pale as he bent over the board. The game went quickly; there was never any doubt in my mind of the next move, and there seemed a grim certainty about his. I cannot tell you now what moves we made, or what the end-play was, but I knew suddenly that his king was trapped, and he knew too, for as I reached out to touch my queen his face was murderous.

Board and men went over on the floor as he lunged to his feet, but I was watching him and I sprang back over my toppled chair, sweeping up the heavy candlestick. As he lurched toward me, I hurled it at his head.

Was there a web of unseen forces spun around us, drawing us together after those thirty years? Was it chance, or fate? I could hardly have missed,

but I did, and the iron stick crashed past him into the great green bubble with its imprisoned ship.

For one endless moment his iron fingers tore at my throat. For one moment I was beating blindly at his face with both fists, struggling to break away. For one moment he raged down at me, his face contorted with fear and rage, hissing strange syllables in that husky whisper. Then there welled up all around us the surge and roar of the sea, and I heard wind strumming through taut cordage, and the creak of straining blocks, and the snap of filling sails. I heard a great roaring voice shouting orders, and the answering cries of men. And something vast and black rushed past me through the gloom, the smell of the sea was rank in my nostrils, and the lights went out in a howl of rising wind—and the pressure of iron fingers on my throat was gone.

When I could breathe again I found my matches and lit the ship's lamp which hung from the beam overhead. The green glass globe was powder. The ship was gone. And the thing that lay sprawled at my feet among the scattered chessmen, its clothes in tatters and its flesh raked as if by the barnacles of a ship's bottom—its throat ripped as if by one slashing blow of a steel claw—that thing had been too long undersea to be wholly human.



# Up There

by Donald A. Wollheim

*The author admits that he got more fun out of writing this story than almost any other in his career as a writer. Perhaps that is because the curious logic on which this story is based comes from the piquant and eternally exhilarating "doubtfulness" of Charles Fort. This is not to say that the author disbelieves in science, oh no, but simply that what Fort called "The Imp of the Perverse" will keep on intruding itself even into our most solemn recurrences for Twentieth Century fundamentals.*

I DON'T THINK I ever knew what a rugged individualist could be until I came to my Uncle Ephraim's farm to recuperate after my escape at sea. I had been torpedoed aboard one of the convey freighters to England, had been rescued after a long swim in the icy sea, had come out of the hospital in Boston after two weeks under instructions to rest up for a month or so before I could report again for sea service. So I had come to my uncle's farm down in New Hampshire.

I last remembered my uncle as a cantankerous cuss when I had visited his place as a boy. I found that my childhood recollections did not send me astray. He was cantankerous, he was an old cuss, and he had the darndest attitudes and ideas I ever heard of. But I won't say he was crazy—no, I won't say it. I don't dare after what I saw last night around Polaris.

When I walked up to the old farmhouse from the road with my satchel in my hand, I saw no one. The old but well-built house, the prosperous looking grounds, impressed me, they looked solid and substantial. But there was no one in sight. From somewhere there came the sound of hammering and I walked around behind the farmhouse to see. Sure enough Uncle Eph was there standing atop a stepladder leaning against a gleaming silvery airplane, tacking weather-stripping across the edges of the glass-enclosed cabin. It was when I noticed that the ship was marked with the swastika and black cross of the German Luftwaffe and was in fact a big Nazi bomber, that I dropped my grip and stood staring.

"Close yer mouth, yer catching flies," snapped my uncle's sharp voice, "ain't yer never seen an airypplane before?"

"But it's a Nazi airplane," I protested, "and what are you doing with it?"

Uncle stopped his hammering for an instant and gave me a glance of dis-

approval. He shot a stream of tobacco juice towards the ground, shifted his quid and snapped:

"No, it ain't a Nazi plane, it used to be and that's a difference for a fact. It's my plane now and I'll do what I dangwell please with it, no thanks to you."

I walked over to it and looked at it. It was in very good condition, seemed perfectly in order. My uncle finished his hammering and got down. He came up to me, wiping his hands on a piece of rag.

"Purty, ain't she?" he said. "One of the planes that tried to bomb Boston 'other week. The papers suppressed the news. Run out of gas and come down neat as a whistle right here on my land where you see her."

"What happened to the crew?" I asked.

Uncle's eyes twinkled and he spat another stream of tobacco.

"Shot 'em," he said. "Ain't nobody can trespass on my land without permission." He chewed some more and then went on: "Waited for 'em all to step out; it was early morning and they scared hell out of my chickens, then I plugged 'em from the back window with my old bear rifle. Didn't waste a shot, one, two, three, four, just like that." He spat four times in succession.

The old codger's eyes were perfect. Damn it, I could well believe he had done that. "What did you do with the bodies?"

"What did yer think I'd do with 'em?" he snapped peevishly. "I buried 'em behind the barn, I ain't no cannibal I ain't."

Before I could say more, he started walking briskly towards the house. "Come on in and get a bite to eat. Reckon you must be hungry."

I followed him into the house. His old house-keeper, a deaf old maid probably as odd as he was, nodded once at me and showed me to a room. I washed up and came down. Uncle hadn't waited for me, he was already shovelling up his fare with gusto. The man was in great shape for one his age.

After eating a bit, I asked another question that had come to me. "Didn't anyone object to your keeping the plane?"

"Some did," he said, "didn't do 'em no good though."

He took another mouthful and then went on. "What comes out of the sky or is found on my land belongs to me. That's the law. The sheriff tried to get me to give the plane to the government. Heck no, not me. I pay my taxes, I don't owe the government nothin', and the government never gave me no presents and I don't aim to give the government any. Besides I intend to use that plane myself."

"You can't fly," I said, "you never flew a plane in your life."

He finished his plate before answering that. Then he leaned back and pulled out his corn-cob pipe.

"Who taught Wilbur Wright to fly?" he said. "Answer me that?"

I couldn't and he went on: "I ain't no dumber than young Wright. I got books, I can read and I can see and I can think better than most. Heck, of course I can fly that contraption. Lessons is for middle noodles."

"Where are you going to fly it?" I asked.

"Gol darn, you're the most inquisitive askinest young cuss, ain't yer? But I suppose you would be being as how you're one of my own kintfolk. Well,

I'll tell yer since yer ask. I'm agoing to fly it up to the sky and see what's going on up there."

I gasped and nearly choked on my food. "Wha—what! What do you mean 'the sky'? You can't, it isn't possible."

Uncle's eyes twinkled and he shook his head sadly. "Yer just as befuddled as all the rest, ain't yer? Never used yer head for anything but a hat rack. I suppose yer believe I can't fly up as far as I plumb like?"

I finished my food before replying. Then I pushed my seat away determined to find out what the old goat had in his head.

"No, you can't," I shot at him. "After about twenty miles you won't find enough air to support the plane. There isn't any air a thousand miles up and there isn't anything to fly to nearer than two hundred thousand miles."

That didn't phase him a bit. "Rubbish," he snapped. "Fiddle-faddie! Have you ever been twenty miles up?"

"No," I snapped, "and neither were you!"

"Nor either was anyone else, young man!" he barked back. "So don't you believe all that some smart aleck tells you. And there ain't been no one a thousand miles up either to say there wasn't any air, and no one ever measured anything up in the sky."

"Yes, they have," I shouted. "Astronomers have measured everything!"

"Astronomers!" he snapped. "Do you know any? No, you don't. And I don't either. And none of 'em has been up there to find out and none of 'em intends to go up there to find out. Astronomers! Bah! Humbugs!"

"They proved it by telescopes and cameras and mathematics," I retorted in defense of astronomy.

"They proved the earth was flat five hundred years ago and it didn't prove nothing. Don't talk mathematics to me, youngster. Figgers is something that scallywags think up to fool honest folks. Can you figger an orbit or reckon the distance of a star?"

"No, I'm not that educated," I said.

"And neither is anyone else because it can't be done. There ain't no orbits and stars is all the same distance."

"What!" I shouted, "how can that be?"

"Why can't it be?" Uncle Eph came back. "They taught you all yer life a pack of lies until you can't see the forest for the trees. Why should the stars be different distances away? Why shouldn't they all be the same distance only different sizes? For years those smart alecks has been hoodwinking the public with fantastic nonsense just to get the yokels to keep 'em in food and clothing. Every time folks begin to get to thinking about why they should keep on endowing colleges and observatories, the old buzzards get together and come out with some new planet or dizzy idea or maybe they stretch the universe a few trillion miles or squeeze it in a bit or maybe they think up a fourth dimension and befuddle the people that way. Poppycock! Stuff and nonsense! They got the people so fuddled and fooled they can't think straight worth a shucks. But they ain't got me fooled, not for one minute they ain't."

"But it's logical and scientific," I answered weakly.

"Fiddle-faddle," he barked. He took a puff on his pipe. "That plane out

there. That's logical and scientific. But this astronomy—why it don't make sense. Every hundred years they admit what they thought was so last century ain't so this century. That right, young feller?"

"Yes, but science improves and they discard old ideas."

"Improves! Now that's a laugh! You mean they think up wilder ideas to keep the people fooled. Looky here—what's less fantastic? To think the universe is a finite infinity bent around in a fourth dimension no one can figure out, all full of billions of suns busting up atomically, whatever that means, and dozens of planets all whirling around criss-crossing each other while the whole shebang goes rushing through a lot of empty nothingness at crazy speeds like a hundred miles a second maybe? Or to think that the sky is just a land surface like a common-sense ceiling a few hundred miles up and the stars are just volcanoes or maybe the lights of towns and cities and farms? And the sun a blazing bonfire rolling across it along with the planets which are no more than three or four feet across? Now I ask you, think it over. Which is more fantastic? Which sounds more like plain horse-sense?"

I thought it over. Well, how can you answer that? Which is the more fantastic? Obviously the astronomers' ideas were. But did I dare admit it? I tried another angle.

"There are photographs of the stars and planets."

"Ain't seen any photograph yet that couldn't be faked," Uncle Eph demolished that line of reasoning.

"But it just couldn't be!" I exclaimed in desperation.

"Oh yes it could, and it is," Uncle Eph crowed triumphantly. "The whole world is being taken in by a handful of these fakers with their fancy stories and crazy pictures. How these smart alecks don't dare admit that meteors can keep coming down in the same place night after night if they don't come down from a ceiling just overhead?"

"They don't," I gasped.

"Yes, they do," my uncle snapped. "And if the star-humboggers' ideas were right that couldn't happen. But meteors often fall one after another night after night in the same township. Happened here once and there's lots of evidence. Feller named Charles Fort collected piles of evidence the astronomers wouldn't admit."

He got up. "I've talked enough about this. I'm aguing out. Got more work to do on my airplane."

I followed him out, my head in a whirl. What was I to think? Was the whole world being fooled by a handful of men? It wasn't possible. It just *couldn't* be possible.

I watched Uncle working about the plane. He was carrying stocks of food and stuff into it as if for a long trip. Finally I couldn't contain my questions.

"The whole world believes the way the astronomers believe—they couldn't be wrong," I ventured.

Uncle shifted his pipe and stowed away a smoked ham. "Wrong again," he finally stated emphatically. "Do the peasants of China believe it? No," he didn't wait for an answer, "they don't believe. That's a quarter of the world. Do the peasants of India and the black men in Africa and the red

men in South America and the poor people in Europe know about it or believe it? No, and that's half the world that don't believe it. So don't be so smart with that word world. Most of the world don't believe any such nonsense. Most of 'em would agree with me and other common-sense down-to-earth folks."

That set me back on my heels for a while. I wandered around thinking, while Uncle finished the packing of the plane. He had already stowed away a large supply of gasoline and oil tins. It was obvious he was going to take off very soon.

He went into the house again and when he came out I asked him when he planned to leave.

"Tonight, soon's the stars come out so I can get my bearings. Waited for you to come so you could keep the farm in order till I get back."

I saw that he was carrying a couple of books with him and when I got a closer look at them, I was amazed to note they were Chinese dictionaries and grammars.

"Why the Chinese guides?" I asked. "You don't expect to meet any Chinamen up there, do you?"

"Why not?" he chuckled. "The Chinese call themselves Celestials and I guess they ought to know if nobody does. Reckon the people up in the towns up there in the sky are Chinese. Four hundred million clever people can't all be wrong about their own origin. I reckon I'll get along up there."

I think that floored me finally. I went about the rest of the afternoon silently, puzzled and confused. Uncle Eph finished his preparations on the airplane and then conducted me around the farm giving me instructions on what was to be done.

Supper came, night came, the stars came out.

Uncle came down in his heavy winter clothes with a fur cap pulled down over his ears. I went with him to the airplane.

He pointed up towards the North Star.

"I never thought that all-fired important star was pointed out clear enough and I'm fixing to do something about it. Keep yer eye on it," he said. "Well, time to be going. Don't forget to pick up the mail regularly."

"Hey," I yelled at the last minute, "you got a parachute?"

"What fer?" he snapped from the door of his plane "Ain't nothing going to go wrong with me. Parachutes is for bunglers. Now if you'll just step up and turn that crank by the propeller we'll get started."

Dumbly I stepped up and started the propeller turning over. It caught on with a roar. Uncle slammed the door of the cabin shut, waved a hand, and gunned the engine.

The plane jerked forward, started fast, swung wildly and jumped into the air as Uncle Eph threw the throttle on full. It soared at a steep angle and I expected it to crash momentarily or turn over.

But it straightened out a bit, turned towards the north and started upwards in a steady steep rise towards the Pole Star. I watched it as it disappeared into the darkness among the myriad stars of the night.

I expected Uncle to come back that night as soon as he found his airplane

would not rise any farther than the stratosphere. I also waited in dread of hearing the phone ring and being told he had crashed somewhere. But nothing happened that night. He didn't come back and there was no crash.

All next day I thought about it and I convinced myself that I should have called in a doctor and had the old man restrained. He was obviously mad. Heck, his ideas couldn't be true. There were too many scientists backing up the regular theories of the sky.

Yet all that day there were no reports of my uncle's plane. And that night and the next two days after.

I don't know what to think now. Uncle Eph never did come back and he hasn't been heard from unless . . . but I don't like to admit that possibility. It's two weeks now and the only thing I can't account for is that there are now five more stars in the handle of The Big Dipper stretching in an exactly straight line directly to the Pole Star. They were first noticed last night. According to the papers this morning, sailors had them as an aid to navigation, but the astronomers have refused to discuss them.

# The Einstein See-Saw

by Miles J. Brower

*Take a secret invention, a gangster, a professor's daughter, and a good-looking young reporter. Place in a typewriter, mix well, and serve. That used to be the established formula for writing an old-time science-fiction-detective story. This story by Dr. Brower conforms in most respects with that tried-and-true pattern. Yet, in spite of that, it manages to have a certain extra element of the bizarre and the unusual in it that recommended it to your editor. The Einsteinian see-saw mingling its way between many worlds is really pioneering science-fiction, and well, we think, retains its power to provoke every reader's imagination.*



TONY COSTELLO leaned glumly over his neat, glass topped desk, on which a few papers lay arranged in orderly piles. Tony was very blue and discouraged. The foundations of a pleasant and profitable existence had been cut right out from under him. Gone were the days in which the big racket boss, Scarneck Ed, generously rewarded the exercise of Tony's brilliant talents as an engineer in redesigning cars to give higher speed for bootlegging purposes, in devising automatic electric apparatus for handling the concealed liquor, in designing beam-directed radios for secret communication among the gangs. Yes, mused Tony, it had been profitable.

Six months ago the Citizens' Committee had stepped in. Now the police department was reorganized; Scarneck Ed Podkowski was in jail, and his corps of trusty lieutenants were either behind the bars with him or scattered far and wide in flight. Tony, always a free spender, had nothing left but the marvelous laboratory and workshop that Scarneck Ed had built him, and his freedom. For the police could find nothing legal against Tony. They had been compelled to let him alone, though they were keeping a close watch on him. Tony's brow was as dark as the mahogany of his desk. He did not know just how to go about making an honest living.

With a hand that seemed limp with discouragement, he reached into his pocket for his cigarette case. As he drew it out, the lackadaisical fingers failed to hold it firmly enough, and it clattered to the floor behind his chair. With the weary slowness of despondence, he dragged himself to his feet and went behind his chair to pick up the cigarette case. But, before he bent over it, and while he was looking fully and directly at it, his desk suddenly van-

ished. One moment it was there, a huge ornament of mahogany and glass; the next moment there was nothing.

Tony suddenly went rigid and stared at the empty space where his desk had stood. He put his hand to his forehead, wondering if his financial troubles were affecting his reason. By that time, another desk stood in the place.

Tony ran over this strange circumstance mentally. His mental processes were active beneath, though dazed on the surface. His desk had stood there. While looking fully at it, all his senses intact, he had seen it vanish, and for a moment there had been nothing in its place. While he stared directly at the empty space from which the desk had disappeared, another desk had materialized there, like a flash. Perhaps, there had been a sort of jar, a tremor, of the floor and of the air, of everything. But the point was that his own desk, at which he had been working one moment, had suddenly vanished, and at the next moment another desk had appeared in its place.

And what a desk! The one that now stood there was smaller than his own palatial one, and shabbier. A raw, unpleasant golden-oak, much scratched and scuffed. Its top was heaped and piled full of books and papers. In the middle of it stood a photograph of a girl, framed in red leather. Inexpressibly, the sunny beauty of the face, the bright eyes, the firm little chin, the tall forehead topped by a shining mass of light curly hair, drew Tony's first glance. For a few moments his eyes rested delightedly on the picture.

In a moment, however, Tony noticed that the books and papers on the desk were of a scientific character; and such is the nature of professional interest, that for the time he forgot his astonishment at how the desk had got there, in his absorption in the things heaped on top of it.

Perhaps it isn't fair to give the impression that the desk was in disorder. It was merely busy; just as though someone who had been deeply engaged in working had for the moment stepped away. There was a row of books across the back edge, and Tony leaned over eagerly to glance at the titles.

"'Theory of Parallels,' Lobatchevsky; 'Transformation of Complex Functions,' Riemann; 'Tensors and Geodesics,' Gauss," Tony read. "Hm—old stuff. But here's modern dope along the same line. 'Tensors,' by Christoffel; 'Absolute Differential Calculus,' by Ricci and Levi Civita. And Schrödinger and Eddington and D'Abro. Looks like somebody's interested in relativity. Hm!"

He bent over, his constantly increasing interest showing in the attitude of his body; he turned over papers and opened notebooks crowded full of handwritten figures. Last of all he noted the batch of manuscript directly in front of him in the middle of the front edge of the desk. It was typewritten, with corrections and interlineations all over it in purple ink.

A title, "The Parallel Transformations of Equations for Matter, Energy, and Tensors," had been crossed out with purple ink, and "The Intimate Relation between Matter and Tensors" substituted. Tony bent over it and read. He was so fascinated that it did not even occur to him to speculate on the happy circumstance that the mysteriously appearing desk had brought its own scientific explanation with it. The title of the paper told him that its sheets would elucidate the apparently supernatural phenomenon, and all he did was to plunge breathlessly ahead in his eager reading. The article was



short, about seven typewritten sheets. He took out his pencil and followed through the mathematical equations readily. Tony's mind was a brilliant, even though an erratic one.

Under the first article lay a second one. One glance at the title caused Tony to wiffen. Then he picked up the typewritten script and carried it across the big room of his laboratory, as far away from the desk as he could get. He put the girl's photograph in his pocket. Then he took heaps and armfuls of papers, books and notes and carried them from the desk to a bench in the far corner. For, as soon as he had read the title, "A Preliminary Report of Experimental Work in the Physical Manipulation of Tensors," a sudden icy panic gripped his heart lest the desk and its papers suddenly disappear before he had finished reading to the end of the fascinating explanation.

We might add that it did not. For many weeks the desk remained standing in Tony's shop and laboratory, and he had the opportunity to study its contents thoroughly. But it took him only a few hours to grasp its secret, to add his own brilliant conception to it, and to form his great resolve. Once more Tony faced the world hopefully and enthusiastically.

## II.

The police understood Tony's share in the exploits of Scarneck Ed thoroughly, and, chagrined at their failure to produce proof that would hold in court, they maintained a close and constant watch on that gifted gentleman long after crime matters in the city seemed to have been cleaned up and forgotten. For one thing, they still had hope that something would turn up to enable them to round out their work and lock him up with his former pals; for another, they did not fully trust his future behavior. Nevertheless, for three or four months it seemed as though Tony had genuinely reformed. He lived in and for his laboratory and shop. All day the scouts could see him laboring therein, and far into the night he bent over benches and machines under shaded lights. Then, some other astonishing occurrences distracted their attention from Tony to other fields.

One morning Mr. Ambrose Parakeet, private jewel broker, walked briskly out of the elevator on the fourteenth floor of the North American Building and unlocked the door of his office. He flung it open and started in, but stopped as if shot, uttered a queer, hoarse gurgle, and staggered against the door casing. In a moment he recovered and began to shout:

"Help! Help! Robbers!"

Before long, several people had gathered. He stood there, gasping, pointing with his hand into the room. The eagerly peering onlookers could see that beside his desk stood an empty crate. It was somewhat old and weather-beaten and looked as though it might have come from a buffet or bookcase. He stood there and pointed at it and gasped, and the gathering crowd in the corridor wondered what sort of strange mental malady he had been seized with. The elevator girl, with trained promptness had at once summoned the manager of the building, who elbowed his way through the crowd and stood beside Mr. Parakeet.

"There! There! Look! Where is it?" Mr. Parakeet was gasping slowly and gazing round in a circle. He was a little gray man of about sixty and seemed utterly dazed and overcome.

"What's wrong, Mr. Parakeet?" asked the building manager. "I didn't know you had your safe moved out."

"But, no!" panted the bewildered old man. "I didn't. It's gone. Just gone. Last night at five o'clock I locked the office, and it was there, and everything was straight. What did you do? Who took it?"

The building manager conducted the poor old man into the office, shut the door, and asked the crowd to disperse. He sat Mr. Parakeet down into the most comfortable chair he could find, and then barked snappily into the telephone a few times. Then he sat and stared about him, stopping occasionally to reassure the old man and ask him to be patient until things could be investigated. The building manager was an efficient man and knew his building and his tenants. He knew, as thoroughly as he knew his own office, that Mr. Parakeet had a medium-sized A. V. & L. Co.'s safe weighing about three tons, that could not be carried up the elevator when Mr. Parakeet had moved in, and had been hoisted into the window with block and tackle. He knew that it was physically impossible for the safe to go down any of the elevators, and knew that none of the operators would dare move any kind of a safe without his permission. Nevertheless, with the aid of the night watchmen of his building and adjacent ones, it was definitely established that nothing had been moved in or out of the North American Building during the preceding twenty-four hours, either by elevator or through a window to the sidewalk.

The newspapers took up the mystery with a shout. The prostrating loss suffered by Mr. Parakeet, amounting to over a hundred thousand dollars, added no little sensation to the story. A huge safe, disappearing into thin air, without a trace and in its place an old wooden crate! What a mouthful for the scareheads! For several days newspapers kept up items about it, dwindling in size and strategic importance of position; for nothing further was ever found. Every bit of investigation, including that by scientific men from the University of Chicago, was futile; not a trace, not a suggestion did it yield.

Six days later the tall scareheads leaped out again: "Another Safe Disappears! Absolutely No Trace! Some time during the night, the six-foot steel safe of the Simonson Loan Company vanished into thin air. In the morning a dilapidated iron oil-cask was found in its place. The safe was so large and heavy that it could not have been moved without a large truck, special hoisting apparatus, a crew of men and some hours of time. The store was brightly lighted during the entire night, and two watchmen patrolled it regularly. They report that they saw and heard nothing unusual, and were very much amazed, when shown the oil-cask standing where the safe had been the night before." The accounts in the various papers were substantially the same.

Newspaper readers throughout the city and its environs were very much intrigued. Such a thing was very exciting and mystifying; but it was so far out of touch with their own lives that it did not affect them very much at any time except when they were reading the paper or discussing it in con-

vation. The police were the ones who were doing the real worrying. And, when the following week two more safes disappeared, insurance companies began to take an interest in the matter, and everyone who had any considerable amount of valuables in store began to feel panicky.

The circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the last of the series, the fourth, were especially amazing. This was also a jewelry safe. Canzoni's is a popular firm that rents a quarter of a floor in a big department store, and does a large volume of moderate-priced business. The receipts are stored in a heavy portable safe in a corner of the silverware section until evening, when they are carried to the large vault of the big store. One Saturday afternoon after a particularly busy day, Mr. Shipley, Canzoni's manager, was watching the hands of the clock creep toward five-thirty. He leaned on a counter and watched the clerks potting away goods for the night; he glanced idly toward the safe which he intended to open in a few minutes. The doormen had already taken their stations to keep out further customers. Then he glanced back at the safe, and it wasn't there!

Mr. Shipley drew a deep breath. The safe disappearances he had read about flashed through his mind. But he didn't believe it. It couldn't be! Yet, there was the empty corner with the birch panels forming the back of the show-windows, and no safe. In a daze, he walked over to the corner, intending to feel about with his hands and make sure the safe was really gone. Before he got there, there flashed into sight in place of the safe, a barrel of dark wood; and in a moment there was a strong odor of vinegar.

Things spun around with Mr. Shipley for a few moments. He grasped a counter and looked wildly about him. Clerks were hurrying with the covering of counters; no one seemed to have noticed anything. He stood a moment, grined his teeth, and breathed deeply, and soon was master of himself. He stood and waited until the last customer was gone, and then called several clerks and pointed to where the safe had stood.

Within the space of a month, thirteen safes and three million dollars worth of money or property had disappeared. The police were dazed and desperate, and business was in a panic. Scientific men were appealed to, to help solve the riddle, but were helpless. Many of them agreed that though in theory such things were explainable, science was as yet far from any known means of bringing them about in actuality. Insurance companies spent fabulous sums on investigation, and, failing to get results, raised their premiums to impossible levels.

### III.

Phil Hurren, often known as "Zip" Hurren, reporter on the *Examiner*, felt, on the day the managing editor called him into the sanctum, that fortune could smile on him no more brightly. There wasn't anything brighter.

"You stand well with the detective bureau," his boss had said, "and you've followed this safe-disappearing stuff pretty closely. You're relieved of everything else for the time being. Get on that business, and see that the public hears from the *Examiner*!"

Phil knew better than to say any more, for before he recovered from his surprise, the editor had turned his back, buried himself in his work on the desk, and forgotten that Phil was there. Nor did Phil waste any real time in rejoicing. That is why he was called Zip. When things happened, whether it was luck or system, Phil was usually there. In sixty seconds more, Phil was in a taxicab, whirling toward police headquarters.

Luck or system, he didn't know, but he struck it again. The big wagon was just starting away from the station door when he arrived, crowded inside with bluecoats and plainclothes-men. The burly, red-faced man with chevrons on his sleeve, sitting beside the driver, saw Phil jump out, and motioned with his hand. Phil leaped up on the back step of the vehicle and hung on for dear life with his fingers through the wire grating as they careened through the streets. The men on the inside grinned at him; a number of them knew him and liked him. Gradually the door was opened and he crowded in. He found Sergeant Johnson and eyed him intently.

"How the hell do you find these things out, I'd like to know," the sergeant exclaimed. "Are you a mind reader?"

"I don't really know anything," Phil admitted with that humility which the police like on the part of newspaper men and seldom meet with. "Do you mind?"

"No objection," grunted the sergeant. "Been watching all the old crooks since these sales have been popping. Nothin' much on any of them, except this slippery character, Tony Costello. No, we haven't caught him at anything. Seems to be keeping close and minding his own business. Working in his laboratory. Ought to make a good living if he turned honest; clever guy, he seems. But he's been too prosperous lately. Lots of machinery delivered to his place; we traced it to the manufacturers and find it cost thousands. Big deposits in his banks. But no trace of his having sold anything or worked at anything outside his own place. So we're running over to surprise him and help him get the cobwebs out of his closets."

The raid on Tony Costello's shop and laboratory disclosed nothing whatever. They surrounded the place effectively and surprised Tony genuinely. But a thorough search of every nook and cranny revealed nothing whatever of a suspicious nature. There was merely a tremendous amount of apparatus and machinery that none of the raiding party understood anything about. Tony's person was also thoroughly searched, and the leather-framed photograph of the beautiful unknown girl was found.

"Who's this?" the sergeant demanded. "She don't look like anyone that might belong to your crowd."

"I don't know," Tony replied.

"Whad'ya mean, don't know?" The sergeant gave him a rough shake. "Whad'ya carryin' it for, then?"

"I had really forgotten that it was in my pocket," Tony replied calmly, at his ease. "I found it in a hotel room one day, and liked the looks of it."

"I know you're lying there," the sergeant said, "though I'm ready to believe that you don't know her. Too high up for you. Well, it looks suspicious, and we'll take the picture."

"Boy!" gasped Phil. "What a girl she must be in person! Even the picture would stand out among a thousand. May I have the picture, Sergeant?"

"You can come and get a copy of it tomorrow. We'll have it copied and see if we can trace the subject of it. That might tell us something."

The following morning Phil was at Police Headquarters to pick up further information, and to get a copy of the girl's photograph. Like the police, he could not keep his mind off the idea that there was some association between the crooked engineer and the disappearance of the safes. It seemed to fit too well. The scientific nature of the phenomena, Tony Costello's well known reputation for scientific brilliance, and his recent affluence; what else could it mean? In some way, Tony was getting at these safes. But how? And how prove it? Most exhaustive searches failed to reveal any traces of the safes anywhere. If any fragment of one of them had appeared in New York or San Francisco, the news would have come at once, such was the sensation all over the country that the series of disappearances had caused. Tony's calm insolence during the raid, his attitude of waiting patiently till the police should have had their fun and have it over with so that he might be left at peace again, showed that he must be guilty, for anyone else would have protested and felt deeply injured and insulted. He seemed to be enjoying their discomfort, and absolutely confident of his own safety.

"There's got to be some way of getting him," Phil mused, gazing at the photograph of the girl. For many minutes he looked at it, and then put it silently into his pocket.

Five o'clock in the evening of that same day came the news of another safe disappearance. Phil got his tip over the phone, and in fifteen minutes was at the scene. It was too much like the others to go into detail about; a six-foot portable safe had suddenly disappeared right in front of the eyes of the office staff of The Epicure, a huge restaurant and cafeteria that fed five thousand people three times a day. In its place stood a ragged, rusty old Ford coupe body. He went away from there, shaking his head.

Then suddenly in the midst of his dinner, he jumped up and ran. An idea had leaped into his head.

"Right after one of these things pops is the time to take a peck at Tony," he said to himself, and immediately he was on the way.

But how to get his peep was not so easy a problem. When he alighted from his cab a block away from Tony's building, he was hesitant about approaching it. Tony knew him, and might see him first. Phil circled the brick building, keeping under cover or far enough away; all around it was a belt of thirty feet of lawn between the building and the sidewalk. Ought he have called the police and given them his idea? Or should he wait till darkness and see what he could do alone?

Then suddenly he saw her. Across the street, standing in the shelter of a delivery truck in front of an apartment, she was observing Tony's building intently. The aristocratic chin, the brightness of the eyes, the waves of her hair, and the general sunny expression! It could not be anyone else. Post haste he ran across the street.

"Pardon me!" he cried excitedly, lifting his hat and then digging hastily into his inner pocket. "I'm sure you must be the—"

"Well, the nerve!" the young woman said icily, and pointing her chin at the opposite horizon she walked haughtily away.

By that time Phil had dug out his picture and was running after her.

"Please," he said, "just a moment!" And he held the picture out in front of her face.

"Now, where in the world—?" She looked at him in puzzled and indignant inquiry, and then burst out laughing.

"It is you, isn't it?" Phil asked. "What are you laughing at?"

"Oh, you looked so abject. I'm sure your intentions must be good. Now tell me where you got my picture."

"Let us walk this way," suggested Phil, leading away from Tony's building.

And, as they walked, he told her the story. When he got through she stood and looked at him a long time in silence.

"You look square at me," she said. "You're working on my side already. Will you help me?"

"I'll do anything—anything," Phil said, and couldn't think of any other way of expressing his willingness, for the wonderful eyes bore radiantly upon him.

"First I must tell you my story," she began. "But before I can do so, you must promise me that it is to remain an absolute secret. You're a newspaper man—"

Phil gave his promise readily.

"My father is Professor Bloomsbury at the University of Chicago. He has been experimenting in mathematical physics, and I have been assisting him. He has succeeded in proving experimentally the concept of tensors. A tensor is a mathematical expression for the fact that space is smooth and flat, in three dimensions, only at an infinite distance from matter; in the neighborhood of a particle of matter, there is a pucker or a wrinkle in space. My father has found that by suddenly removing a portion of matter from out of space, the pucker flattens out. If the matter is heavy enough and its removal sudden enough, there is a violent disturbance of space. By planning all the steps carefully my father has succeeded in swinging a section of space on a pivot through an angle of 180 degrees, and causing two portions of space to change places through hyperspace, or as you might express it popularly, through the fourth dimension.

Phil held his hands to his head.

"It is not difficult," she went on smiling. "Loan me your pocket knife and a piece of paper from your notebook. If I cut out a rectangular piece of paper from this sheet and mount it on a pivot or shaft at A B, I can rotate it through 180 degrees just like a child's teeter-totter, so that a point X will be where another point Y originally was. That is in two dimensions. Now, simply add one dimension all the way round and you will have what daddy is doing with space. He does it by shoving fifty or a hundred pounds of lead right out of space, the sudden flattening out of the tensors causes a section of space to flop around, and two portions of space change places. The first time he tried it,

his desk disappeared, and we've never seen it again. We've thought it was somewhere out in hyperspace; but this terrible story of yours about disappearing safes, and the fact that you have this picture means that someone has got the desk."

"Surely you must have suspected that long ago, when the disappearances first began?" Phil suggested.

"I've just returned from Europe," said Miss Bloomsbury. "I was tremendously puzzled when I got my first newspapers in New York and read about the safes. Gradually I gathered all the news on the subject, and it seemed most reasonable to suspect this gangster engineer."

"Great minds and same channels," Phil smiled. "But your father. Why didn't he speak up when the safes began to pop?"

"Ha! Ha!" she laughed a tinkly little laugh. "My father doesn't know what safes are for, nor who is president, nor that there has been a war. Mother and I take care of him, and he works on tensors. He has probably never heard about the safes."

"What were you going to do around here?" Phil asked, marveling at the courage of the girl who had come to look the situation over personally.

"I hadn't formed any definite plans. I just wanted to look about first."

"Well," said Phil, "as you will soon see by the papers, another safe has popped out. It occurred to me that we might find out something by spying about here immediately after one of the disappearances. That's why I'm here. If you'll tell me where you live, or wait for me at some safe place, I'll come and report to you as soon as I find out anything."

"Oho! So that's the kind of a girl you think I am!" She laughed sunnily again. "No, Mr. Reporter. Either we reconnoiter together, or each on our own."

"Oh, together, by all means," said Phil so earnestly that she laughed again. "And since we'd better wait for darkness, let's have something to eat somewhere. I didn't finish my dinner."

Phil found lone Bloomsbury in person to be even more wonderful than her photograph suggested. Obviously she had brains; it was apparent, too, that she had breeding. Her cheerful view of the world was like a tonic for tired nerves; and, withal, she had a gentle sort of courtesy in her manner that may have been old-fashioned, but it was almost too much for Phil. Before the dinner was over, he would have laid his heart at her feet. It gave him a thrill that went to his head, to have her by his side, slipping along through the darkness toward Tony's building.

This building was a one-story brick affair with a vast amount of window space. From the sidewalk they could see faint lights glowing within, but could make out no further details. They therefore selected the darkest side of the building, and made their way hurriedly across the lawn. Here, they found, they could see the crowding apparatus within the one long room fairly well. They looked into one window after another, making a circuit around the building, until Phil suddenly clutched the girl's arm.

"Look!" he whispered. "Straight ahead and a little to the left!"

At the place he indicated stood a tall safe. Across the top of its door were painted in gold letters, the words, "The Epicure."

"That's the safe that went tonight?" whispered Phil. "That's all we need to know. Now, quick to a telephone!"

"Oh," said a gently, ironic, voice behind them, "not so quick!"

They whirled around and found themselves looking into two automatic pistols, and behind them in the light of the street lamps, the sardonic smile of Tony Costello.

"Charmed at your kind of interest in my playthings, I'm sure," he purred. "Only it leaves me in an embarrassing position. I'm not exactly sure what to do about it. Kindly step inside while I think."

Phil made a move sideways along the wall.

"Stop!" barked Costello sharply. "Of course," his voice was quiet again, "that might be the simplest way out. I think I am within my legal rights if I shoot people who are trying to break into my property. Yet, that would be messy—not neat. Better step in. The window swings outward."

At the point of his pistols they clambered through the window, and he came in after them. He kept on talking, as though to himself, but loud enough for them to hear.

"Yes, we want some way out that is neater than that. Hmm! Violence distresses me. Never liked Ed's rough methods. Yet this is embarrassing."

He turned to them.

"What did you really want here? I see that you are the *Examiner's* reporter, and that you are the lady of the photograph. What did you come here for? Ah, yes, the safe. Well, go over and look at it."

As they hesitated, he stamped his foot and shrilled crankily:

"I mean it! Go, look at the safe! Is there anything else you want to know?"

"Yes," said Phil coolly, his self-control returning, "where are the other safes?"

"Oh. Anything to oblige. Last requests are a sort of point of honor, aren't they? Ought to grant them. Stand close to that safe!"

He backed away, his guns levelled at them. He laid down the right one, keeping the left one aimed, and moved some knobs on a dial and threw over a big switch. A muffled rumbling and whirring began somewhere; and then slowly, a block of tables and apparatus ten feet square rose upward toward the ceiling. A section of the floor on which they stood came up, supported by columns, and now formed the roof of a room that had risen out of the floor. In it were four safes.

"Poor old Ed!" sighed Tony. "There was a time when he had a lot of good stuff put away down there. I've got six rooms like that. Well, the good old times are over."

He threw out the switch and the whole mass sank slowly and silently downward till the floor was level and there was no further sign of it. Then he backed away to another table, across the room from them, keeping his gun levelled.

"Too bad," he said. "I don't like to do these things. But," he sighed deeply, "self preservation. Now I'm going to flip you out, yes, out into a strange



region. I've never been there. I don't know if there is food or drink there. I hope so, for you'll never get back here."

Phil stiffened. He determined to leap and risk a shot. But it was too late. Tony's hand came down on a switch. There was a sudden, nauseating jar. The laboratory vanished.

There was only the safe, lone Bloomsbury and himself, and a small circle of concrete floor extending to a dim little horizon a dozen feet away. Beyond that, nothing. Not blue, as the sky is. Not black, as dark, empty spaces are. It suggested black, because there was no impression of light or color on the eyes; but it wasn't black. It was nothingness.

#### IV.

"I suppose you realize what he has done?" Miss Bloomsbury inquired.

"Couldn't be too sure, but it looks like plenty. What's the equation for it?" Beneath his jocularity, Phil felt a tremendous sinking within him. It looked serious, despite the fact that he did not understand it at all.

"He has swung us out into hyperspace, or into the fourth dimension, as your newspaper readers might understand it, and has let us hang there. Remember our slip of paper. Suppose X and Y were swung out of the plane of the paper and allowed to remain at an angle with it. We are at an angle with space, out in hyperspace."

There was a period of bewilderment, almost panic, in which they both felt so physically weak that they had to sit down on the concrete and stare at each other mutely. But this passed and their natural courage soon reasserted itself. Their first thought was to take stock of what information they could get on their situation, and their first step was to venture as close as possible to the queer little horizon which lay almost at their very feet. It gave them a frightened feeling, as though they were standing high upon a precipice or tower.

To their surprise, the horizon receded as they walked toward it, always remaining about a dozen feet away from them. At first they walked on concrete and then came to a crumbly edge of it and found themselves stepping on hard, sandy earth. Later there was rock, sometimes granite-like, sometimes black and shiny. But what they saw underfoot was nothing, compared with the glimpses of things they got out in the surrounding emptiness. First there was a vast space in which a soft light shone, and in which there were countless spheres of various sizes, motionlessly suspended. The spheres seemed to be made of wood, a green, sap-filled, unseasoned wood. The scene was visible for a few seconds, and vanished suddenly as they walked on. This astonished them; so they stepped back a pace or two and saw it again; and as they moved on, it disappeared again.

Then there was a great stretch of water in which the backs of huge monsters rolled and from which a hot wind blew for a few instants until they passed on and the scene vanished. There was a short walk with nothing but emptiness, and then there appeared huge, oblique, cubistic looking rows of jagged rocks in wild, dizzy formations that didn't look possible; and farther

on, after another interval of emptiness, a tangle of brown, ropey vines with black-green leaves on them, an immense space filled with serpentine swinging loops and lengths of innumerable vines. Several loops projected so near them that they could have reached out and touched them had they wished.

"This is too much for me!" Phil gasped. "Have we gone crazy? Or did he kill us, and this is Purgatory?"

Ione smiled and shook her little head in which she had a goodly store of modern mathematics stored away.

"These must be glimpses of other 'spaces' besides our own space. If we could see in four dimensions we could see them all spread out before us. But we can only perceive in three dimensions; therefore, as we walk through hyperspace past the different 'spaces' which are ranged about in it, we get a glimpse into such of them as are parallel with our own space. Can you understand that?"

"Oh, yes," groaned Phil. "It sounds just about like it looks. But don't mind me. Go on, have your fun."

"I've been thinking about those wooden spheres," continued Ione. "I'm sure they must be sections of trees that are cut crosswise by our 'space'; they grow in three dimensions, but only two of them are our dimensions and a third is strange to us. We see only three-dimensional sections of them, which are spheres. There is more of them, that we cannot see, in another dimension."

"Yes, yes. Just as plain as the Jabberwock!"

"Look! There's a real Jabberwock!" exclaimed Ione.

On ahead of them they saw a number of creatures that seemed to be made of painted wooden balls in different colors, joined together.

"Tinkertoys!" exclaimed Phil. "Live ones! Big ones!"

The animals, though they looked for all the world as though they were made of painted wood, moved with jerky motions and clattered and snarled.

"There is probably more to *them* in another dimension," Ione said.

Suddenly one of the beasts approached them with a leap. There were two big eyes and two rows of teeth that came together with a snap, right on Phil's trouserleg. He jerked himself away, sacrificing some square inches of trouserleg, and, whirling around, kicked at the thing with all his force. It almost paralyzed his foot, for the animal seemed to be made of wood or bone. But it disappeared, and, as it did, both of them felt a queer, nauseating jolt. A few more minutes' walk brought them back to the safe without seeing any more spaces; and the sight of its black iron bulk filled them with a homelike relief, which in a moment they recognized as a mockery.

"Are we on a sphere of some sort?" Phil asked.

"Probably on an irregular mass of matter," Ione replied, "part of which is Tony's concrete floor, and part of which comes out of some other dimension. This mass of matter is at one end of a long, barlike portion of space, the middle of which is pivoted in our world, somewhere in Chicago, and both ends of which are free in hyperspace."

"Then," suggested Phil, "why can't we walk down to the axle on which it is balanced, and step out into Chicago?"

"Because there isn't any *matter* for us to walk on. We are not able to move

about in space, in three dimensions, you know. We can only get around in two dimensions, on the surface of *matter*."

"Well, let's try another exploration trip at right angles to our first one. After all, these 'spaces' are an interesting show, and I want to see some more."

They started out in the selected direction, and after a short walk got a glimpse of a vast space dotted with stars and nebulae, with two bright moons sailing overhead. A few steps farther on was a wall of solid granite, near enough to touch with their hands. Again, there was an intensely active mass of weaving bright stripes and loops and circles, seeming to consist of light only, and making them dizzy in a few seconds. Lone wondered if it might not be something like an organic molecule on a large scale. Again, odd, queer, indescribable shapes and outlines would appear and disappear, obviously three-dimensional sections of multi-dimensional things, cut by space. Once they passed a place of such intense cold and terrific noise that they escaped destruction or lunacy only because it took them the merest instant to get past.

They arrived back at the safe, very much fatigued from the strain, their minds woefully confused. Hunger and thirst were beginning to thrust up their little reminders; and for the first time the terrors of their position, flung out into hyperspace on a small, barren piece of matter, began to seem real.

After a rest they started out again. As Phil had touched, in kicking it, a creature from another "space," perhaps they might find water and even food somewhere. They retraced their first steps to the spot where they had at first seen water. They found it again and were able to dip their hands into it. It was warm, and too salty to drink. They came to the place with the creepers or vines, and Phil reached out and seized one of them. It was heavy, rubbery, and elastic, stretching readily as he pulled it.

"These little lurches that we feel must be the snapping back of the space-packers as expressed by tensors," Lone remarked. "Every time matter goes in or out of space, the nature of space is altered."

"Well," observed Phil, releasing the vine, "I'd better be careful. If one of these things hauls me off here, our last bond with home is gone. I don't want to get lost in some other space."

As he released the vines they snapped back to their places, and the forest of them dimmed a little and reappeared.

They made the round again, dodging cautiously past the point where they had previously found the "Tinkertoy" animals, and succeeded in getting past their snapping teeth. But no promise of food or water did they find anywhere.

"Looks like we're sunk," observed Phil, as they dropped down on the concrete to rest, leaning their backs against the safe.

How time counted in hyperspace, neither Phil nor Lone could tell; Phil knew that his watch was running. He knew that it was ages and ages that he sat with his back against the safe, reviewing all the events of his past life, and thinking of this ignominious end to a lively career! He swore half aloud; then suddenly looked at Lone, ready to apologize. He found her weeping silently.

"I should never have let you come into the building with me," he stammered in confusion at her tears.

"Oh, what do I care what becomes of *me*!" she exclaimed angrily. "But who will take care of poor daddy? He doesn't even know when it's time to eat." And she burst into a fresh fit of weeping.

Phil beat his head in the dumbness of profound despair.

## V.

Despair, however, is a luxury. Necessity is a stimulus. With the parchings of thirst and the gnawings of hunger, the two young people ceased swearing and weeping. Phil got up and paced about and sat down again. Ione's tears stopped and dried, and she sat and thought.

In the back of her mind there had been forming a vague sort of an idea, which had signalled ahead of itself that there was hope. She sat there and desperately drove her reason to its utmost efforts, to find that idea and bring it to the surface of consciousness. Hand to hand fights with wild animals, battles between ships of the line, vicious duels between ace aviators in the clouds are tense fights; but they cannot compare in anxious difficulty with the struggle to bring up an unformed idea out of the subconscious mind—especially when one knows that the idea is there, and that it must be found to save one's life.

"Ione!" exclaimed Phil. It was the first time he had used the name. "What is the matter? You are as tense as a—"

"Ah!" cried Ione, springing up. "Tense! Tensors! I have it!"

Phil gazed at her in alarm. She laughed; at first it was a strained laugh, but gradually it melted into her sunny one.

"No, I'm not crazy. I know there was a way out, and I've been trying to reason it out. How simple. You remember the little jolts when you pulled at the vines and when you kicked the funny animal? Tensors. Matter and space are so closely interrelated that you can't move matter in or out of space without causing disturbance, recoils, and tremors in space. Those bits of matter were small, and produced only a slight disturbance. It takes about a hundred pounds of lead to swing this segment—"

"Oho! Got you!" exclaimed Phil. "Not so dumb! The safe!"

"Yes. The safe!" Ione cried.

"Throw it off and watch us swing, eh? What would happen?"

"I might calculate it if I knew the weight of the safe."

"No calculating when I'm around," Phil said. "It couldn't make things any worse. Try it first and calculate afterwards."

They got behind the safe and pushed, and their combined strength against it was about as effective as it would have been in moving the People's Gas Building. They sat down again in despair.

"Suppose we *could* budge it," Ione said. "All we could do would be to push it around this piece of matter we are on. That wouldn't help. We've got to get it out of space. We can't push it hard enough to do that. It's got to be shot out suddenly—"

"And we haven't got a gun handy," Phil remarked droopingly.

"Not exactly a gun. A sort of sling—"

Phil leaped to his feet.

"A sling. Why! To be sure! The vines!"

Without another word, both of them got up and ran. They hastened in a direction opposite to the one they had at first taken on their trip of exploration, and this brought them first past the "space" of the Tinkertoylike animals. As they went by, several of these beasts darted at them, one of them snapping at lone's heels. She uttered a scream causing Phil to turn about and kick right and left among them. He drove them back and escaped from them rejoicing lone.

"Wait," he said, when they reached the vines. "Remember those wooden balls. If I could get a few to throw at those critters—"

In a moment they were off, and finally arrived at the point from which they first saw the balls. Odd it seemed, how they hung suspended in space, thousands of them, all sizes. Phil reached out and grasped one about the size of a baseball and drew it toward himself. He felt a dizzy lurch and heard lone scream.

"Let go!" she screamed again.

When he suddenly realized what was going on he found himself prostrate on the ground, with lone across him, her arms about his knees.

"Do you realize," she panted, disentangling herself, "that you were pulling yourself out of this space into that one?"

"Thanks!" said Phil "Never say die. More careful this time, and a smaller one."

He reached out and grasped a ball smaller than a golf-ball, and pulled carefully, keeping an eye upon lone. There was resistance to his pull, but gradually the ball came. It seemed heavy. There was a crack as of breaking wood, and he fell backward, with a wave of nausea sweeping strongly over him. He gazed in amazement at a heavy wooden stick that he held in his hands. The only thing about it that suggested the ball for which he had reached was its diameter.

"Can't understand it, but appreciate it just the same," he said. He broke the stick in two, and had two excellent clubs.

"Simple," lone replied. "The balls are cross-sections of these trees or sticks which grow in a 'space' at right angles to our own; and we only see their three-dimensional cross-sections."

A short walk brought them to the "space" of the vines. After testing the matter out carefully, they found that they could each pull two of them at a time. The vines stretched amazingly when they found those whose far ends were fixed firmly in the tangle, permitting them to carry their own ends along with them toward the safe. Phil wound his vines around his left arm and stuck one club through his belt. The other he got ready for the wooden animals.

He needed it. The size of the pack was doubled, and he rapped them till his hand was numb before he and lone got by. Their vines drew out thin, but held until they were firmly tied about the safe. They went back after four more.

"I should judge," Phil said, "that by the time we get thirty or forty, the

elastic pull will be strong enough to drag the safe back with them as they snap back home."

Trip after trip they made, fighting the wooden animals with their clubs each time. Their clothes were torn, and their legs bleeding; their throats dry and lips cracked. The hard animals seemed to have a persistent, mechanical ferocity that was undismayed by hammering with the clubs and by repeated repulses. Phil could not seem to hurt them; he merely knocked them away. Finally, on the ninth trip, lone collapsed when she reached the safe. As she fell, the elasticity of the vines began slowly to drag her back with them. Phil was forced to sit across her knees while he tied his own vines about the safe. Then he released her and added her vines to the great cable about the safe.

An overbold hard animal rattled up and snapped at her. Goaded to fury, Phil swung at it with his club and hurled it through the air. He could feel the lurch as it left his space and entered another. Then he pushed with his mightiest effort against the safe. It budged, and slid a few inches. He used his stick as a lever. It moved again, a little faster. Lone struggled to her feet and tried to help, but her efforts were ineffectual.

With one arm about her, Phil pried again under the safe, knowing that another trip after vines was out of the question. Another animal snapped at their heels. For a while, it was kick backwards, then a shove at the safe. Each time the safe moved. The sight of its movement revived lone, so that she was able to push also. Gradually it acquired a steady motion, pulled by the contraction of the vines; its progress soon became faster and faster. Phil was about to follow it and give it another push, when lone drew him back. Suddenly they experienced a sinking sensation and a fearful vertigo. The snapping animals faded. Ahead of them was the forest of vines, and they saw the safe hurled into it, crashing, plunging into the tangled mass. The whole view crumpled and moved upwards like a swirl of leaves in a wind, and then vanished with a snap.

They were sick and dizzy, but tremendously curious to see everything. The water, the cubistic cliffs, the vast space full of balls, all curiously blurred, appeared in succession. There were blank spaces and then blurred sights of things which they did not recognize, never having seen them before. Then the dizziness and the nausea abated, and ahead of them was a vast yellow blaze, a huge nebula, and in it were double-colored suns and ringed planets with swarms of moons; this glorious sight remained for many seconds, as they gazed at it in panting astonishment, half reclining on the concrete; and then it faded. Again the nausea came on; again the succession of blurred views. Eventually the myriad spheres, the water with the leviathans, the forest of vines, each succeeding scene grew more blurred. Their nausea was correspondingly increased, till they were forced to lie down on the ground from illness.

When their giddiness abated, there were blurring views again. There was an impression as though the speed of a train were decreasing as one looks out of the window. And now one view held for several seconds, a vast and wild mountain range with glaciers and snow peaks by moonlight. When this faded gradually, the scenes began to flick by, more and more rapidly, and

grew blurred. Phil and Ione were attacked by nausea until, again, they had to lie down. After that came the familiar succession: the wooden animals, the tangle of wires, the vast sea, the spheres, and more blurred scenes. Then came a pause, with the nebula and the glorious wins swinging into view once again.

"Oh, I understand!" Ione exclaimed. "We're swinging. The safe was so heavy that we swung too violently, too far, and back again—"

"And we keep going till it knocks us out, or till the old cat dies," added Phil. However, they found that after a number of repetitions of the same program, their giddiness was becoming less; and instead of the swing, they could look about. Then it occurred to Phil to time the interval between the nebula and the mountain range. When the exact halfway point was determined, and after several more swings, they could see dimly the windows and machinery of Tony's laboratory flash by when they passed the middle.

"I don't mean to be a crepe hanger, but how do you know we will stop at the right point?" Phil asked.

"I don't," replied Ione cheerfully. "But mathematics says so. A freely oscillating segment of space would naturally come to equilibrium in a position parallel to the rest of its own space, would it not?"

There came a swing when they did not reach the nebula on the one hand and the mountain-range on the other. After that, views dropped off from either end of the swing quite rapidly, and before many minutes, they looked into Tony's laboratory a large portion of the time. For many seconds the laboratory held; then it would gradually fade, and reappear again, only to fade into empty nothingness all around.

"The old cat's dead," Phil finally announced.

They sat and stared about them as the laboratory held them steady and no further intervening periods of blankness intervened. They both sighed deeply and slumped over the ground to rest.

*Bang! Bang! Bang!* Some sort of hammering woke them up. They looked about them in a daze. It was broad daylight, and things looked queer in the laboratory. There was a smell of scorched rubber and hot oil. Great loops of wire sagged down from above. Several nondescript heaps stood about that might once have been machinery, but now suggested melting snowmen, all fused into heaps. At a table sprawled a queer misshapen figure that suggested human origin. Both of its hands were burned to cinders to the elbows. Great holes were scorched into the clothes. But the face was recognizable. Tony's playthings had got him at last.

"Looks like something's happened in here!" Phil gasped, in amazement.

"I'll bet it has, too," Ione exclaimed. "This is the first time it occurred to me that our recoil from throwing the safe overboard and the oscillation of our space-segment must have created a tremendous electrical field in the tetra-ordinate apparatus. The reaction is reversible, you see. The field swings the space-segment, or the swinging of the space-segment creates the field. And the field was too much for Tony.

At this point the door fell under the blows of the police, and the raiding squad rushed into the room.

# In Amundsen's Tent

by John Martin Leahy

*It was in our youth that we first read this story of Amundsen's tent and we have never forgotten it. Some of its details may have eluded our memory, but that one reading was quite enough to make it an unforgettable horror-chiller. When you realize that the Antarctic region is a continent—an area comparable only with the Americas, Europe, or Africa, and yet is totally, utterly, absolutely uninhabited—as uninhabited as let us say the Moon, then it is something to cause terror and wonder in itself. This strangely unearthly area is not actually un-Earth—it is a part of our world, a part that resists life. What price peace of mind on such a terrible terrain?*

INSIDE THE TENT, in a little bag, I left a letter, addressed to H. M. the King, giving information of what he (*sic*) had accomplished. . . Besides this letter, I wrote a short epistle to Captain Scott, who, I assumed, would be the first to find the tent."

Captain Amundsen: *The South Pole*.

"We have just arrived at this tent, 2 miles from our camp, therefore about 1½ miles from the pole. In the tent we find a record of five Norwegians having been here, as follows:

Roald Amundsen  
Olav Olavson Bjaaaland  
Hilmer Hansen  
Sverre H. Hassel  
Oscar Wisting

16 Dec. 1911.

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"Left a note to say I had visited the tent with companions."

Captain Scott: his last journal.

"Travelers," says Richard A. Proctor, "are sometimes said to tell marvelous stories; but it is a noteworthy fact that, in nine cases out of ten, the marvelous stories of travelers have been confirmed."

Certainly no traveler ever set down a more marvelous story than that of Robert Drumgold. This record I am at last giving to the world, with my



humble apologies to the spirit of the hapless explorer for withholding it so long. But the truth is that Eastman, Dahlstrom and I thought it the work of a mind deranged; little wonder, forsooth, if his mind had given way, what with the fearful sufferings which he had gone through and the horror of that fate which was closing in upon him.

What was it, that *thing* (if thing it was) which came to him, the sole survivor of the party which had reached the Southern Pole, thrust itself into the tent and, issuing, left but the severed head of Drungold there?

Our explanation at the time, and until recently, was that Drungold had been set upon by his dogs and devoured. Why, though, the flesh had not been stripped from the head was to us an utter mystery. But that was only one of the many things that were utter mysteries.

But now we know—or feel certain—that this explanation was as far from the truth as that desolate, ice-mantled spot where he met his end is from the smiling, flower-spangled regions of the tropics.

Yes, we thought that the mind of poor Robert Drungold had given way, that the horror in Amundsen's tent and that thing which came to Drungold there in his own—we thought all was madness only. Hence our suppression of this part of the Drungold manuscript. We feared that the publication of so extraordinary a record might cast a cloud of doubt upon the real achievements of the Sutherland expedition.

But of late our ideas and beliefs have undergone a change that is nothing less than a metamorphosis. This metamorphosis, it is scarcely necessary to say, was due to the startling discoveries made in the region of the Southern Pole by the late Captain Stanley Livingstone, as confirmed and extended by the expedition conducted by Darwin Frontenac. Captain Livingstone, we now learn, kept his real discovery, what with the doubts and denision which met him on his return to the world, a secret from every living soul but two—Darwin Frontenac and Bond McQuestion. It is but now, on the return of Frontenac, that we learn how truly wonderful and amazing were those discoveries made by the ill-starred captain. And yet, despite the success of the Frontenac expedition, it must be admitted that the mystery down there in the Antarctic is enhanced rather than dissipated. Darwin Frontenac and his companions saw much; but we know that there are things and beings down there that they did not see. The Antarctic—or, rather, part of it—has thus suddenly become the most interesting and certainly the most fearful area on this globe of ours.

So another marvelous story told—or, rather, only partly told—by a traveler has been confirmed. And here are Eastman and I preparing to go once more to the Antarctic to confirm, as we hope, another story—one eerie and fearful as any ever conceived by any romanticist.

And to think that it was ourselves, Eastman, Dahlstrom and I, who made the discovery! Yes, it was we who entered the tent, found there the head of Robert Drungold and the pages whereon he had scrawled his story of mystery and horror. To think that we stood there, in the very spot where it had been, and thought the story but as the baseless fabric of some madman's vision!

How vividly it all rises before me again—the white expanse, glaring, blinding in the untempered light of the Antarctic sun; the dogs straining in the harness, the cases on the sleds, long and black like coffins; our sudden halt as Eastman fetched up in his tracks, pointed and said, "Hello, what's that?"

A half-mile or so off to the left, some object broke the blinding white of the plains.

"*Nuvataq*, I suppose," was my answer.

"Looks to me like a cairn or a tent," Dahlstrom said.

"How on earth," I queried, "could a tent have got down here in 87° 30' south? We are far from the route of either Amundsen or Scott."

"H'm," said Eastman, shoving his amber-colored glasses up onto his forehead that he might get a better look, "I wonder. Jupiter Ammon, Nels," he added, glancing at Dahlstrom, "I believe that you are right."

"It certainly," Dahlstrom nodded, "looks like a cairn or a tent to me. I don't think it's a *nuvataq*."

"Well," said I, "it would not be difficult to put it to the proof."

"And that, my hearties," exclaimed Eastman, "is just what we'll do! We'll soon see what it is—whether it is a cairn, a tent, or only a *nuvataq*."

The next moment we were in motion, heading straight for the mysterious object there in the midst of the eternal desolation of snow and ice.

"Look there!" Eastman, who was leading the way, suddenly shouted. "See that? It is a tent!"

A few moments, and I saw that it was indeed so. But who had pitched it there? What were we to find within it?

I could never describe those thoughts and feelings which were ours as we approached that spot. The snow lay piled about the tent to a depth of four feet or more. Near by, a splintered ski protruded from the surface—and that was all.

And the stillness! The air, at the moment, was without the slightest movement. No sounds but those made by our movements, and those of the dogs, and our own breathing, broke that awful silence of death.

"Poor devils!" said Eastman at last. "One thing, they certainly pitched their tent well."

The tent was supported by a single pole, set in the middle. To this pole three guy-lines were fastened, one of them as taut as the day its stake had been driven into the surface. But this was not all; a half-dozen lines, or more, were attached to the sides of the tent. There it had stood for we knew not how long, boding defiance to the fierce winds of that terrible region.

Dahlstrom and I each got a spade and began to remove the snow. The entrance we found unfastened but completely blocked by a couple of provision-cases (empty) and a piece of canvas. "How on earth," I exclaimed, "did those things get into that position?"

"The wind," said Dahlstrom. "And, if the entrance had not been blocked, there wouldn't have been any tent here now; the wind would have split and destroyed it long ago."

"H'm," mused Eastman. "The wind did it, Nels—blocked the place like that? I wonder."

The next moment we had cleared the entrance. I thrust my head through the opening. Strangely enough, very little snow had drifted in. The tent was dark green, a circumstance which rendered the light within somewhat weird and ghastly—or perhaps my imagination contributed not a little to that effect.

"What do you see, Bill?" asked Eastman. "What's inside?"

My answer was a cry, and the next instant I had sprung back from the entrance.

"What is it, Bill?" Eastman exclaimed. "Great heaven, what is it, man?"

"A head!" I told him.

"A head?"

"A human head!"

He and Dahlstrom stooped and peered in. "What is the meaning of this?" Eastman cried. "A severed human head!"

Dahlstrom dashed a mittened hand across his eyes.

"Are we dreaming?" he exclaimed.

"'Tis no dream, Nels," returned our leader. "I wish to heaven it was. A head! A human head!"

"Is there nothing more?" I asked.

"Nothing. No body, not even stripped bone—only that severed head. Could the dogs—"

"Yes?" queried Dahlstrom.

"Could the dogs have done this?"

"Dogs!" Dahlstrom said. "This is not the work of dogs."

We entered and stood looking down upon the grisly remnant of mortality.

"It wasn't dogs," said Dahlstrom.

"Not dogs?" Eastman queried. "What other explanation is there—except cannibalism?"

Cannibalism! A shudder went through my heart. I may as well say at once, however, that our discovery of a good supply of pemmican and biscuit on the sled, at that moment completely hidden by the snow, was to show us that that fearful explanation was not the true one. The dogs! That was it, that was the explanation—even though what the victim himself had set down told us a very different story. Yes, the explorer had been set upon by his dogs and devoured. But there were things that militated against that theory. Why had the animals left that head—in the frozen eyes (they were blue eyes) and upon the frozen features of which was a look of horror that sends a shudder through my very soul even now? Why, the head did not have even the mark of a single fang, though it appeared to have been *chewed* from the trunk. Dahlstrom, however, was of the opinion that it had been *hacked* off.

And there, in the man's story, in the story of Robert Drungold, we found another mystery—a mystery as insoluble (if it was true) as the presence here of his severed head. There the story was, scrawled in lead-pencil across the pages of his journal. But what were we to make of a record—the concluding pages of it, that is—so strange and so dreadful?

But enough of this, of what we thought and of what we wondered. The journal itself lies before me, and I now proceed to set down the story of

Robert Drumgold in his own words. Not a word, not a comma shall be deleted, inserted or changed.

Let it begin with his entry for January the 3rd, at the end of which day the little party was only fifteen miles (geographical) from the Pole.

Here it is.

Jan. 3.—Lat. of our camp  $89^{\circ} 45' 10''$ . Only fifteen miles more, and the Pole is ours—unless Amundsen or Scott has beaten us to it, or both. But it will be ours just the same, even though the glory of discovery is found to be another's. What shall we find there?

All are in fine spirits. Even the dogs seem to know that this is the consummation of some great achievement. And a thing that is a mystery to us is the interest they have shown this day in the region before us. Did we halt, there they were gazing and gazing straight south and sometimes sniffing and sniffing. What does it mean?

Yes, in fine spirits all—dogs as well as we three men. Everything is auspicious. The weather for the last three days has been simply glorious. Not once, in this time, has the temperature been below minus 5. As I write this, the thermometer shows one degree above. The blue of the sky is like that of which painters dream, and, in that blue, tower cloud formations, violet-tinged in the shadows, that are beautiful beyond all description. If it were possible to forget the fact that nothing stands between ourselves and a horrible death save the meager supply of food on the sleds, one could think he was in some fairyland—a glorious fairyland of white and blue and violet.

A fairyland? Why has that thought so often occurred to me? Why have I so often likened this desolate, terrible region to fairyland? Terrible? Yes, to human beings it is terrible—frightful beyond all words. But, though so unutterably terrible to men, it may not be so in reality. After all, are all things, even of this earth of ours, to say nothing of the universe, made for man—this being (a god-like spirit in the body of a quasi-ape) who, set in the midst of wonders, leers and slavers in madness and hate and wallows in the muck of a thousand lusts? May there not be other beings—yes, even on this very earth of ours—more wonderful—yes, and more terrible too—than he?

Heaven knows, more than once, in this desolation of snow and ice, I have seemed to feel their presence in the air about us—nameless entities, disembodied, *awaking* things.

Little wonder, forsooth, that I have again and again thought of these strange words of one of America's greatest scientists, Alexander Winchell:

"Nor is incorporated rational existence conditioned on warm blood, nor on any temperature which does not change the forms of matter of which the organism may be composed. There may be intelligences corporealized after some concept not involving the processes of ingestion, assimilation and reproduction. Such bodies would not require daily food and warmth. They might be lost in the abysses of the ocean, or laid up on a stormy cliff through the tempests of an arctic winter, or plunged in a volcano for a hundred years, and yet retain consciousness and thought."

All this Winchell tells us is conceivable, and he adds:

*"Bodies are merely the local fixing of intelligence to particular modifications of universal matter and force."*

And these entities, nameless things whose presence I seem to feel at times—are they benignant beings or things more fearful than even the madness of the human brain ever has fashioned?

But, then, I must stop this. If Sutherland or Travers were to read what I have set down here, they would think that I was losing my senses or would declare me already insane. And yet, as there is a heaven above us, it seems that I do actually believe that this frightful place knows the presence of beings other than ourselves and our dogs—things which we cannot see but which are watching us.

Enough of this.

Only fifteen miles from the Pole. Now for a sleep and on to our goal in the morning. Morning! There is no morning here, but day unending. The sun now rides as high at midnight as it does at midday. Of course, there is a change in altitude, but it is so slight as to be imperceptible without an instrument.

But the Pole! Tomorrow the Pole! What will we find there? Only an unbroken expanse of white, as—

Jan. 4.—The mystery and horror of this day—oh, how could I ever set that down? Sometimes, so fearful were those hours through which we have just passed, I even find myself wondering if it wasn't all only a dream. A dream? I would to heaven that it had been but a dream! As for the end—I must keep such thoughts out of my head.

Got under way at an early hour. Weather more wondrous than ever. Sky an azure that would have sent a painter into ecstasies. Cloud formations indescribably beautiful and grand. The going, however, was pretty difficult. The place a great plain stretching away with a monotonous uniformity of surface as far as the eye could reach. A plain never trod by human foot before? At length, when our dead reckoning showed that we were drawing near to the Pole, we had the answer to that. Then it was that the keen eyes of Travers detected some object rising above the blinding white of the snow.

On the instant Sutherland had thrust his amber glasses up onto his forehead and had his binoculars to his eyes.

"Cairn!" he exclaimed, and his voice sounded hollow and very strange. "A cairn or a—*eww*. Boys, they have beaten us to the Pole!"

He handed the glasses to Travers and leaned, as though a sudden weariness had settled upon him, against the provision-cases on his sled.

"Forestalled!" said he. "Forestalled!"

I felt very sorry for our brave leader in those, his moments of terrible disappointment, but for the life of me I did not know what to say. And so I said nothing.

At that moment a cloud concealed the sun, and the place where we stood was suddenly involved in a gloom that was deep and awful. So sudden and pronounced, indeed, was the change that we gazed about us with curious and wondering looks. Far off to the right and to the left, the plain blazed white and blinding. Soon, however, the last gleam of sunshine had vanished

from off it. I raised my look up to the heavens. Here and there edges of cloud were touched as though with the light of wrathful golden fire. Even then, however, that light was fading. A few minutes, and the last angry gleam of the sun had vanished. The gloom seemed to deepen about us every moment. A curious haze was concealing the blue expanse of the sky overhead. There was not the slightest movement in the gloomy and weird atmosphere. The silence was heavy, awful, the silence of the abode of utter desolation and of death.

"What on earth are we in for now?" said Travers.

Sutherland moved from his sled and stood gazing about into the eerie gloom.

"Queer change, this!" said he. "It would have delighted the heart of Doré."

"It means a blizzard, most likely," I observed. "Haden't we better make camp before it strikes us? No telling what a blizzard may be like in this awful spot."

"Blizzard?" said Sutherland. "I don't think it means a blizzard, Bob. No telling, though. Mighty queer change, certainly. And how different the place looks now, in this strange gloom! It is surely weird and terrible—that is, it certainly looks weird and terrible."

He turned his look to Travers.

"Well, Bill," he asked, "what did you make of it?"

He waved a hand in the direction of that mysterious object the sight of which had so suddenly brought us to a halt. I say in the direction of the object, for the thing itself was no longer to be seen.

"I believe it is a tent," Travers told him.

"Well," said our leader, "we can soon find out what it is—cain or tent, for one or the other it must certainly be."

The next instant the heavy, awful silence was broken by the sharp crack of his whip.

"Mush on, you poor brutes!" he cried. "On we go to see what is over there. Here we are at the South Pole. Let us see who has beaten us to it."

But the dogs didn't want to go on, which did not surprise me at all, because, for some time now, they had been showing signs of some strange, inexplicable uneasiness. What had got into the creatures, anyway? For a time we puzzled over it; then we *knew*, though the explanation was still an utter mystery to us. They were *afraid*. Afraid? An inadequate word, indeed. It was fear, stark, terrible, that had entered the poor brutes. But whence had come this inexplicable fear? That also we soon knew. The thing they feared, whatever it was, was in that very direction in which we were headed!

A cain, a tent? What did this thing mean?

"What on earth is the matter with the cutters?" exclaimed Travers. "Can it be that—"

"It's for us to find out what it means," said Sutherland.

Again we got in motion. The place was still involved in that strange, weird gloom. The silence was still that awful silence of desolation and of death.

Slowly but steadily we moved forward, urging on the reluctant, fearful animals with our whips.

At last Sutherland, who was leading, cried out that he saw it. He halted, peering forward into the gloom, and we urged our teams up alongside his.

"It must be a tent," he said.

And a tent we found it to be—a small one supported by a single bamboo and well guyed in all directions. Made of drab-colored gabardine. To the top of the tent-pole another had been lashed. From this, motionless in the still air, hung the remains of a small Norwegian flag and, underneath it, a pennant with the word "Fram" upon it. Amundsen's tent!

What should we find inside it? And what was the meaning of that—the strange way it bulged out on one side?

The entrance was securely laced. The tent, it was certain, had been here for a year, all through the long Antarctic night; and yet, to our astonishment, but little snow was piled up about it, and most of this was drift. The explanation of this must, I suppose, be that, before the air currents have reached the Pole, almost all the snow has been deposited from them.

For some minutes we just stood there, and many, and some of them dreadful enough, were the thoughts that came and went. Through the long Antarctic night! What strange things this tent could tell us had it been vouchsafed the power of words! But strange things it might tell us, nevertheless. For what was that inside, making the tent bulge out in so unaccountable a manner? I moved forward to feel of it there with my mittened hand, but, for some reason that I cannot explain, of a sudden I drew back. At that instant one of the dogs whined—the sound so strange and the terror of the animal so unmistakable that I shuddered and felt a chill pass through my heart. Others of the dogs began to whine in that mysterious manner, and all shrank back cowering from the tent.

"What does it mean?" said Travers, his voice sunk almost to a whisper. "Look at them. It is as though they are imploring us to—keep away."

"To keep away," echoed Sutherland, his look leaving the dogs and fixing itself once more on the tent.

"Their senses," said Travers, "are keener than ours. They already know what we can't know until we see it."

"See it?" Sutherland explained. "I wonder. Boys, what are we going to see when we look into that tent? Poor fellows! They reached the Pole. But did they ever leave it? Are we going to find them in there dead?"

"Dead?" said Travers with a sudden start. "The dogs would never act that way if 'twas only a corpse inside. And, besides, if that theory was true, wouldn't the sleds be here to tell the story? Yet look around. The level uniformity of the place shows that no sled lies buried here."

"That is true," said our leader. "What *can* it mean? What *could* make that tent bulge out like that? Well, here is the mystery before us, and all we have to do is unlace the entrance and look inside to solve it."

He stepped to the entrance, followed by Travers and me, and began to unlace it. At that instant an icy current of air struck the place and the pennant above our heads flapped with a dull and ominous sound. One of the dogs, too, thrust his muzzle skyward, and a deep and long-drawn howl arose. And

while the mournful, savage sound yet filled the air, a strange thing happened.

Through a sudden rent in that gloomy curtain of cloud, the sun sent a golden, awful light down upon the spot where we stood. It was but a shaft of light, only three or four hundred feet wide, though miles in length, and there we stood in the very middle of it, the plain on each side involved in that weird gloom, now denser and more eerie than ever in contrast to that sword of golden fire which thus so suddenly had been flung down across the snow.

"Queer place this!" said Travers. "Just like a beam lying across a stage in a theater."

Travers' smile was a most apposite one, more so than he perhaps ever dreamed himself. That place was a stage, our light the wrathful fire of the Antarctic sun, ourselves the actors in a scene stranger than any ever beheld in the mimic world.

For some moments, so strange was it all, we stood there looking about us in wonder and perhaps each one of us in not a little secret awe.

"Queer place, all right!" said Sutherland. "But—"

He laughed a hollow, sardonic laugh. Up above, the pennant flapped and flapped again, the sound of it hollow and ghostly. Again rose the long-drawn, mournful, fiercely sad howl of the wolf-dog.

"But," added our leader, "we don't want to be imagining things, you know."

"Of course not," said Travers.

"Of course not," I echoed.

A little space, and the entrance was open and Sutherland had thrust head and shoulders through it.

I don't know how long it was that he stood there like that. Perhaps it was only a few seconds, but to Travers and me it seemed rather long.

"What is it?" Travers exclaimed at last. "What do you see?"

The answer was a scream—the horror of that sound I can never forget—and Sutherland came staggering back and, I believe, would have fallen had we not sprung and caught him.

"What is it?" cried Travers. "In God's name, Sutherland, what did you see?"

Sutherland beat the side of his head with his hand, and his look was wild and horrible.

"What is it?" I exclaimed. "What did you see in there?"

"I can't tell you—I can't! Oh, oh, I wish that I had never seen it! Don't look! Boys, don't look into that tent—unless you are prepared to welcome madness, or worse."

"What gibberish is this?" Travers demanded, gazing at our leader in astonishment. "Come, come, man! Buck up. Get a grip on yourself. Let's have an end to this nonsense. Why should the sight of a dead man, or dead men, affect you in this mad fashion?"

"Dead men?" Sutherland laughed, the sound wild, maniacal.



"Dead men? If 'twas only that! Is this the South Pole? Is this the earth, or are we in a nightmare on some other planet?"

"For heaven's sake," cried Travers, "come out of it! What's got into you? Don't let your nerves go like this."

"A dead man?" queried our leader, peering into the face of Travers. "You think I saw a dead man? I wish it was only a dead man. Thank God, you two didn't look!"

On the instant Travers had turned.

"Well," said he, "I am going to look!"

But Sutherland cried out, screamed, sprang after him and tried to drag him back.

"It would mean horror and perhaps madness!" cried Sutherland. "Look at me. Do you want to be like me?"

"No!" Travers returned. "But I am going to see what is in that tent."

He struggled to break free, but Sutherland clung to him in a frenzy of madness.

"Help me, Bob!" Sutherland cried.

"I hold him back, or we'll all go insane."

But I did not help him to hold Travers back, for, of course, it was my belief that Sutherland himself was insane. Nor did Sutherland hold Travers. With a sudden wrench, Travers was free. The next instant he had thrust head and shoulders through the entrance of the tent.

Sutherland groaned and watched him with eyes full of unutterable horror.

I moved toward the entrance, but Sutherland flung himself at me with such violence that I was sent over into the snow. I sprang to my feet full of anger and amazement.

"What the hell," I cried, "is the matter with you, anyway? Have you gone crazy?"

The answer was a groan, horrible beyond all words of man, but that sound did not come from Sutherland. I turned. Travers was staggering away from the entrance, a hand pressed over his face, sounds that I could never describe breaking from deep in his throat. Sutherland, as the man came staggering up to him, thrust forth an arm and touched Travers lightly on the shoulder. The effect was instantaneous and frightful. Travers sprang aside as though a serpent had struck at him, screamed and screamed yet again.

"There, there!" said Sutherland gently. "I told you not to do it. I tried to make you understand, but—but you thought that I was mad."

"It can't belong to this earth!" moaned Travers.

"No," said Sutherland. "That horror was never born on this planet of ours. And the inhabitants of earth, though they do not know it, can thank God Almighty for that."

"But it is *here*!" Travers exclaimed. "How did it come to this awful place? And where did it come from?"

"Well," consoled Sutherland, "it is dead—it must be dead."

"Dead? How do we know that it is dead? And don't forget this: it didn't come here alone!"

Sutherland started. At that moment the sunlight vanished, and everything was once more involved in gloom.

"What do you mean?" Sutherland asked. "Not alone? How do you know that it did not come alone?"

"Why, it is there *inside* the tent; but the entrance was laced—from the *outside*!"

"Fool, fool that I am!" cried Sutherland a little fiercely. "Why didn't I think of that? Not alone! Of course it was not alone!"

He gazed about into the gloom, and I knew the nameless fear and horror that chilled him to the very heart, for they chilled me to my very own.

Of a sudden arose again that mournful, savage howl of the wolf-dog. We three men started as though it was the voice of some ghoul from hell's most dreadful corner.

"Shut up, you brute!" gritted Travers. "Shut up, or I'll brain you!"

Whether it was Travers' threat or not, I do not know; but that howl sank, ceased almost on the instant. Again the silence of desolation and of death lay upon the spot. But above the tent the pennant stirred and rustled, the sound of it, I thought, like the slithering of some repulsive serpent.

"What did you see in there?" I asked them.

"Bob—Bob," said Sutherland, "don't ask us that."

"The thing itself," said I, turning, "can't be any worse than this mystery and nightmare of imagination."

But the two of them threw themselves before me and barred my way.

"No!" said Sutherland firmly. "You must not look into that tent, Bob. You must not see that—that—I don't know what to call it. Trust us; believe us, Bob! 'Tis for your sake that we say that you must not do it. We, Travers and I, can never be the same men again—the brains, the souls of us can never be what they were before we saw *that*!"

"Very well," I acquiesced. "I can't help saying, though, that the whole thing seems to me like the dream of a madman."

"That," said Sutherland, "is a small matter indeed. Insane? Believe that it is the dream of a madman. Believe that we are insane. Believe that you are insane yourself. Believe anything you like. Only *don't look!*"

"Very well," I told him. "I won't look. I give in. You two have made a coward of me."

"A coward?" said Sutherland. "Don't talk nonsense, Bob. There are some things that a man should never know; there are some things that a man should never see; that horror there in Amundsen's tent is—both!"

"But you said that it is dead."

Travers groaned. Sutherland laughed a little wildly.

"Trust us," said the latter; "believe us, Bob. 'Tis for your sake, not for our own. For that is too late now. We have seen it, and you have not."

For some minutes we stood there by the tent, in that weird gloom, then turned to leave the cursed spot. I said that undoubtedly Amundsen had left some records inside, that possibly Scott had reached the Pole, and visited the tent, and that we ought to secure any such memories. Sutherland and Travers

nodded, but each declared that he would not put his head through that entrance again for all the wealth of Orinus and of Ind—or words to that effect. We must, they said, get away from the awful place—get back to the world of men with our fearful message.

"You won't tell me what you saw?" I said, "and yet you want to get back so that you can tell it to the world."

"We aren't going to tell the world what we saw," answered Sutherland. "In the first place, we couldn't, and, in the second place, if we could, not a living soul would believe us. But we can warn people, for that thing in there did not come alone. Where is the other one—or the others?"

"Dead, too, let us hope!" I exclaimed.

"Amen!" said Sutherland. "But maybe, as Bill says, it isn't dead. Probably—"

Sutherland paused, and a wild, indescribable look came into his eyes.

"Maybe it—*can't die!*"

"Probably," said I nonchalantly, yet with secret disgust and with poignant sorrow.

What was the use? What good would it do to try to reason with a couple of madmen? Yes, we must get away from this spot, or they would have me insane, too. And the long road back? Could we ever make it now? And what *had* they seen? What unimaginable horror was there behind that thin wall of gabardine? Well, whatever it was, it was real. Of that I could not entertain the slightest doubt. Real? Real enough to wreck, virtually instantaneously, the strong brains of two strong men. But—were my poor companions really mad, after all?

"Or maybe," Sutherland was saying, "the other one, or the others, went back to Venus or Mars or Sirius or Algol, or hell itself, or wherever they came from, to get more of their kind. If that is so, heaven have pity on poor humanity! And, if it or they are still here on this earth, then sooner or later—it may be a dozen years, it may be a century—but sooner or later the world will know it, know it to its woe and to its horror. For they, if living, or if gone for others, will come again."

"I was thinking—" began Travers, his eyes fixed on the tent.

"Yes?" Sutherland queried.

"—that," Travers told him, "it might be a good plan to empty the rifle into that thing. Maybe it isn't dead; maybe it can't die—maybe it only *changes*. Probably it is just hibernating, so to speak."

"If so," I laughed, "it will probably hibernate till doomsday."

But neither one of my companions laughed.

"Or," said Travers, "it may be a demon, a ghost materialized. I can't say incarnated."

"A ghost materialized?" I exclaimed. "Well, may not every man or woman be just that? Heaven knows, many a one acts like a demon or a fiend incarnate."

"They may be," nodded Sutherland. "But that hypothesis doesn't help us any here."

"It may help things some," said Travers, starting toward his sled.

A moment or two, and he had got out the rifle.

"I thought," said he, "that nothing could ever take me back to that entrance. But the hope that I may—"

Sutherland groaned.

"It isn't earthly, Bill," he said hoarsely. "It's a nightmare. I think we had better go now."

Travers was going—straight toward the tent.

"Come back, Bill!" groaned Sutherland. "Come back! Let us go while we can."

But Travers did not come back. Slowly he moved forward, rifle thrust out before him, finger on the trigger. He reached the tent, hesitated a moment, then thrust the rifle-barrel through. As fast as he could work trigger and lever, he emptied the weapon into the tent—into that horror inside it.

He whirled and came back as though in fear the tent was about to spew forth behind him all the legions of foulest hell.

*What was that?* The blood seemed to freeze in my veins and heart as there arose from out the tent a sound—a sound low and throbbing—a sound that no man ever had heard on this earth—one that I hope no man will ever hear again.

A panic, a madness seized upon us, upon men and dogs alike, and away we fled from that cursed place.

The sound ceased. But again we heard it. It was more fearful, more unearthly, soul-maddening, hellish than before.

"Look!" cried Sutherland. "Oh, my God, *look at that!*"

The tent was barely visible now. A moment or two, and the curtain of gloom would conceal it. At first I could not imagine what had made Sutherland cry out like that. Then I saw it, in that very moment before the gloom hid it from view. The tent was moving! It swayed, jerked like some shapeless monster in the throes of death, like some nameless thing seen in the horror of nightmare or limned on the brain of utter madness itself.

And that is what happened there; that is what we saw. I have set it down at some length and to the best of my ability under the truly awful circumstances in which I am placed. In these hastily crawled pages is recorded an experience that, I believe, is not surpassed by the wildest to be found in the pages of the most imaginative romanticist. Whether the record is destined ever to reach the world, ever to be scanned by the eye of another—only the future can answer that.

I will try to hope for the best. I cannot blink the fact, however, that things are pretty bad for us. It is not only this sinister, nameless mystery from which we are fleeing—though heaven knows that is horrible enough—but it is the *words* of my companions. And, added to that, is the fear for my own. But there, I must get myself in hand. After all, as Sutherland said, I didn't see it. I must not give way. We must somehow get our story to the world, though we may have for our reward only the mockery of the world's unbelief, its scoffing—the world, against which is now moving, gathering, a menace more dread-

ful than any that ever moved in the fevered brain of any prophet of woe and blood and disaster.

We are a dozen miles or so from the Pole now. In that mad dash away from that tent of horror, we lost our bearings and for a time, I fear, went panicky. The strange, eerie gloom denser than ever. Then came a fall of fine snow-crystals, which rendered things worse than ever. Just when about to give up in despair, chanced upon one of our beacons. This gave us our bearings, and we pressed on to this spot.

Travers has just thrust his head into the tent to tell us that he is sure he saw something moving off in the gloom. Something moving! This must be looked into.

(If Robert Drungold could only have left as full a record of those days which followed as he had of that fearful 4th of January! No man can ever know what the three explorers went through in their struggle to escape that doom from which there was no escape—a doom the mystery and horror of which perhaps surpass in gruesomeness what the most dreadful Gothic imagination ever conceived in its utterest abandonment to delirium and madness.)

Jan. 5.—Travers *had* seen something, for we, the three of us, saw it again today. Was it that horror, that thing not of this earth, which they saw in Amundsen's tent? We don't know what it is. All we know is that it is something that moves. God have pity on us all—and on every man and woman and child on this earth of ours if this thing is what we fear!

6th.—Made 25 mi. today—20 yesterday. Did not see it today. *But heard it.* Seemed near—once, in fact, as though right over our heads. But that must have been imagination. Effect on dogs most terrible. Poor brutes! It is as horrible to them as it is to us. Sometimes I think even more. Why is it following us?

7th.—Two of the dogs gone this morning. One or another of us on guard all "night." Nothing seen, not a sound heard, yet the animals have vanished. Did they desert us? We say that is what happened but each man of us knows that none of us believes it. Made 18 mi. Fear that Travers is going mad.

8th.—Travers gone! He took the watch last night at 12, relieving Sutherland. That was the last seen of Travers—the last that we shall ever see. No tracks—not a sign in the snow. Travers, poor Travers, gone! Who will be the next?

Jan. 9.—*Saw it again!* Why does it let us see it like this—sometimes? Is it that horror in Amundsen's tent? Sutherland declares that it is not—that it is something even more hellish. But then S. is mad now—mad—mad—mad. If I wasn't sane, I could think that it all was only imagination. *But I saw it!*

Jan. 11.—Think it is the 11th but not sure. I can no longer be sure of anything—save that I am alone and that it is watching me. Don't know how I know, for I cannot see it. But I do know—it is watching me. It is always watching. And sometime it will come and get me—as it got Travers and Sutherland and half of the dogs.

Yes, today must be the 11th. For it was yesterday—surely it was only yesterday—that it took Sutherland. I didn't see it take him, for a fog had come up, and Sutherland—he would go on in the fog—was so slow in following

that the vapor hid him from view. At last when he didn't come, I went back. But S. was gone—man, dogs, sled, everything was gone. Poor Sutherland! But then he was mad. Probably that was why it took him. Has it spared me because I am yet sane? S. had the rifle. Always he clung to that rifle—as though a bullet could save him from what we saw! My only weapon is an ax. But what good is an ax?

*JAN. 13th.*—Maybe it is the 14th, I don't know. What does it matter? Saw it *three* times today. Each time it was closer. Dogs still whining about tent. There—that horrible hellish sound again. Dogs still now. That sound again. But I dare not look out. The ax.

Flours later. Can't write any more.

Silence. Voices—I seem to hear voices. But that sound again.

Coming nearer. At entrance now—*now*—

# Ubbo-Sathla

by Clark Ashton Smith

Science now conjectures that life originated on Earth when this planet was barely more than an endless, shoreless steaming ocean. That origin must have appeared as a mass of thin scum, a glob of slime, of formless raw protoplasm, having neither shape, stability, or any other quality save the mindless urge to feed and spread. From this initial slime came all the higher forms of life, from the amoeba upwards. With his all-encompassing imagination, Clark Ashton Smith rolls back time, travels down the ladder of evolution again, from recorded epoch, to legendary epoch, to forgotten epoch, to recital that genetic moment—and find a new mystery. . . .



... *OR UBBO-SATHLA is the source and the end. Before the coming of Zhothaquah or Yoth-Zothok or Kibulhut from the stars, Ubbo-Sathla dwelt in the steaming fens of the new-made Earth: a mass without head or members, spanning the gray, formless ebb of the prime and the gritty prototypes of terrene life. . . . And all earthly life, as it is told, shall go back at last through the great circle of time to Ubbo-Sathla.*

—The Book of Eriqon.

Paul Tregardis found the milky crystal in a litter of oddments from many lands and eras. He had entered the shop of the curio-dealer through an aimless impulse, with no object in mind, other than the idle distraction of eyeing and fingering a miscellany of far-gathered things. Looking desultorily about, his attention had been drawn by a dull glimmering on one of the tables, and he had extolled the queer orb like stone from its shadowy, crowded position between an ugly little Aztec idol, the fossil egg of a dinosaur, and an obscene fetish of black wood from the Niger.

The thing was about the size of a small orange and was slightly flattened at the ends, like a planet at its poles. It puzzled Tregardis, for it was not like an ordinary crystal, being cloudy and changeable, with an intermittent glowing in its heart, as if it were alternately illumined and darkened from within. Holding it to the wintry window, he studied it for a while without being able to determine the secret of this singular and regular alternation. His puzzlement was soon complicated by a dawning sense of vague and

irrecognizable familiarity, as if he had seen the thing before under circumstances that were now wholly forgotten.

He appealed to the curio-dealer, a dwarfish Hebrew with an air of dusty antiquity, who gave the impression of being lost to commercial considerations in some web of cabalistic revery.

"Can you tell me anything about this?"

The dealer gave an indescribable, simultaneous shrug of his shoulders and his eyebrows.

"It is very old—palaegean, one might say. I can not tell you much, for little is known. A geologist found it in Greenland, beneath glacial ice, in the Miocene strata. Who knows? It may have belonged to some sorcerer of primeval Thule. Greenland was a warm, fertile region beneath the sun of Miocene times. No doubt it is a magic crystal; and a man might behold strange visions in its heart, if he looked long enough."

Tregardis was quite startled; for the dealer's apparently fantastic suggestion had brought to mind his own delvings in a branch of obscure lore; and, in particular, had recalled *The Book of Erbon*, that strangest and rarest of occult forgotten volumes, which is said to have come down through a series of manifold translations from a prehistoric original written in the lost language of Hyperborea. Tregardis, with much difficulty, had obtained the mediæval French version—a copy that had been owned by many generations of sorcerers and Satanists—but had never been able to find the Greek manuscript from which the version was derived.

The remote, fabulous original was supposed to have been the work of a great Hyperborean wizard, from whom it had taken its name. It was a collection of dark and baleful myths, of liturgies, rituals and incantations both evil and esoteric. Not without shudders, in the course of studies that the average person would have considered more than singular, Tregardis had collated the French volume with the frightful *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred. He had found many correspondences of the blackest and most appalling significance, together with much forbidden data that was either unknown to the Arab or omitted by him . . . or by his translators.

Was this what he had been trying to recall, Tregardis wondered—the brief, casual reference in *The Book of Erbon*, to a cloudy crystal that had been owned by the wizard Zon Mezzamalech, in Mhu Thulan? Of course, it was all too fantastic, too hypothetic, too incredible—but Mhu Thulan, that northern portion of ancient Hyperborea, was supposed to have corresponded roughly with modern Greenland, which had formerly been joined as a peninsula to the main continent. Could the stone in his hand, by some fabulous fortuity, be the crystal of Zon Mezzamalech?

Tregardis smiled at himself with inward irony for even conceiving the absurd notion. Such things did not occur—at least, not in present-day London; and in all likelihood, *The Book of Erbon* was sheer superstitious fantasy, anyway. Nevertheless, there was something about the crystal that continued to tease and inveigle him. He ended by purchasing it, at a fairly moderate price. The sum was named by the seller and paid by the buyer without bargaining.

With the crystal in his pocket, Paul Tregardis hastened back to his lodgings



instead of resuming his leisurely saunter. He installed the milky globe on his writing-table, where it stood firmly enough on one of its oblate ends. Then, still smiling at his own absurdity, he took down the yellow parchment manuscript of *The Book of Eibon* from its place in a somewhat inclusive collection of *recherché* literature. He opened the vermiculated leather cover with hasps of tarnished steel, and read over to himself, translating from the archaic French as he read, the paragraph that referred to Zon Mezzamalech:

*"This wizard, who was mighty among sorcerers, had found a cloudy stone, orb-like and somewhat flattened at the ends, in which he could behold many visions of the terrene past, even to the Earth's beginning, when Ubbo-Sathla, the unbegotten source, lay vast and swollen and yeasty amid the vaporing dome. . . . But of that which he beheld, Zon Mezzamalech left little record; and people say that he vanished presently, in a way that is not known; and after him the cloudy crystal was lost."*

Paul Tregardis laid the manuscript aside. Again there was something that mystified and beguiled him, like a lost dream or a memory forfeit to oblivion. Impelled by a feeling which he did not scrutinize or question, he sat down before the table and began to stare intently into the cold, nebulous orb. He felt an expectation which, somehow, was so familiar, so permeative a part of his consciousness, that he did not even name it to himself.

Minute by minute he sat, and watched the alternate glimmering and fading of the mysterious light in the heart of the crystal. By imperceptible degrees, there stole upon him a sense of dreamlike duality, both in respect to his person and his surroundings. He was still Paul Tregardis—and yet he was someone else; the room was his London apartment—and a chamber in some foreign but well-known place. And in both milieus he peered steadily into the same crystal.

After an interim, without surprise on the part of Tregardis, the process of re-identification became complete. He knew that he was Zon Mezzamalech, a sorcerer of Mhu Thulan, and a student of all lore anterior of his own epoch. Wise with dreadful secrets that were not known to Paul Tregardis, amateur of anthropology and the occult sciences in latter day London, he sought by means of the milky crystal to attain an even older and more fearful knowledge.

He had acquired the stone in debitable ways, from a more than sinister source. It was unique and without fellow in any land or time. In its depths, all former years, all things that had ever been, were supposedly mirrored, and would reveal themselves to the patient visionary. And through the crystal, Zon Mezzamalech had dreamt to recover the wisdom of the gods who died before the Earth was born. They had passed to the lightless void, leaving their lore inscribed upon tables of ultra-stellar stone; and the tables were guarded in the primal mire by the formless, idiotic demiurge, Ubbo-Sathla. Only by means of the crystal could he hope to find and read the tablets.

For the first time, he was making trial of the globe's reputed virtues. About him an ivory panelled chamber, filled with his magic books and paraphernalia, was fading slowly from his consciousness. Before him, on a table of some dark Hyperborean wood that had been graven with grotesque ciphers,

the crystal appeared to swell and deepen, and in its filmy depth he beheld a swift and broken swirling of dim scenes, fleeting like the bubbles of a mill-race. As if he looked upon an actual world, cities, forest, mountains, seas and meadows flowed beneath him, lightening and darkening as with the passage of days and nights in some weirdly accelerated stream of time.

Zon Mezzamalech had forgotten Paul Tregardis—had lost the remembrance of his own entity and his own surroundings in Mhu Thulan. Moment by moment, the flowing vision in the crystal became more definite and distinct, and the orb itself deepened till he grew giddy, as if he were peering from an insecure height into some never-lathomed abyss. He knew that time was racing backward in the crystal, was unrolling for him the pageant of all past days; but a strange alarm had seized him, and he feared to gaze longer. Like one who has nearly fallen from a precipice, he caught himself with a violent start and drew back from the mystic orb.

Again, to his gaze the enormous whirling world into which he had peered was a small and cloudy crystal on his rune-wrought table in Mhu Thulan. Then, by degrees, it seemed that the great room with sculptured panels of mammoth ivory was narrowing to another and dingier place; and Zon Mezzamalech, losing his preternatural wisdom and sorcerous power, went back by a weird regression into Paul Tregardis.

And yet not wholly, it seemed, was he able to return. Tregardis, dazed and wondering, found himself before the writing-table on which he had set the oblate sphere. He felt the confusion of one who has dreamed and has not yet fully awakened from the dream. The room puzzled him vaguely, as if something were wrong with its size and furnishings; and his remembrance of purchasing the crystal from a curio-dealer was oddly and discrepantly mingled with an impression that he had acquired it in a very different manner.

He felt that something very strange had happened to him when he peered into the crystal; but just what it was he could not seem to recollect. It had left him in the sort of psychic muddlement that follows a debauch of hashish. He assured himself that he was Paul Tregardis, that he lived on a certain street in London, that the year was 1933; but such commonplace verities had somehow lost their meaning and their validity; and everything about him was shadow-like and insubstantial. The very walls seemed to waver like smoke; the people in the streets were phantoms of phantoms; and he himself was a lost shadow, a wandering echo of something long forgot.

He resolved that he would not repeat his experiment of crystal-gazing. The effects were too unpleasant and equivocal. But the very next day, by an unreasoning impulse to which he yielded almost mechanically, without reluctance, he found himself seated before the misty orb. Again he became the sorcerer Zon Mezzamalech in Mhu Thulan; again he dreamt to retrieve the wisdom of the antemundane gods; again he drew back from the deepening crystal with the terror of one who fears to fall; and once more—but doubtfully and dimly, like a failing wraith—he was Paul Tregardis.

Three times did Tregardis repeat the experience on successive days; and each time his own person and the world about him became more tenuous

and confused than before. His sensations were those of a dreamer who is on the verge of waking; and London itself was unreal as the lands that slip from the dreamer's ken, receding in filmy mist and cloudy light. Beyond it all, he felt the looming and crowding of vast imageries, alien but half familiar. It was as if the fantasmagoria of time and space were dissolving about him, to reveal some veritable reality—or another dream of space and time.

There came, at last, the day when he sat down before the crystal—and did not return as Paul Tregardis. It was the day when Zon Mezzamatoch, boldly disregarding certain evil and portentous warnings, resolved to overcome his curious fear of falling bodily into the visionary world that he beheld—a fear that had hitherto prevented him from following the backward stream of time for any distance. He must, he assured himself, conquer his fear if he were ever to see and read the lost tablets of the gods. He had beheld nothing more than a few fragments of the years of Mhu Thulan immediately posterior to the present—the years of his own lifetime; and there were inestimable cycles between these years and the Beginning.

Again, to his gaze, the crystal deepened immeasurably, with scenes and happenings that flowed in a retrograde stream. Again the magic ciphers of the dark table faded from his ken, and the sorcerously carved walls of his chamber melted into less than dream. Once more he grew giddy with an awful vertigo as he bent above the swirling and milling of the terrible gulfs of time in the work-like orb. Fearfully, in spite of his resolution, he would have drawn away; but he had looked and leaned too long. There was a sense of abysmal falling, a suction as of ineluctable winds, of maelstroms that bore him down through fleet unstable visions of his own past life into antenatal years and dimensions. He seemed to endure the pangs of an inverse dissolution; and then he was no longer crystal, but an actual part of the weirdly racing stream that ran back to reattain the Beginning.

He seemed to live unnumbered lives, to die myriad deaths, forgetting each time the death and life that had gone before. He fought as a warrior in half-legendary battles; he was a child playing in the ruins of some olden city of Mhu Thulan; he was the king who had reigned when the city was in its prime, the prophet who had foretold its building and its doom. A woman, he wept for the bygone dead in necropolis long-crumbled; an antique wizard, he muttered the rude spells of earlier sorcery; a priest of some pre-human god, he wielded the sacrificial knife in cave-temples of pillared basalt. Lite by lite, era by era, he retraced the long and groping cycles through which Hyperborea had risen from savagery to a high civilization.

He became a barbarian of some troglodytic tribe, fleeing from the slow, turreted ice of a former glacial age into lands illumed by the ruddy flare of perpetual volcanoes. Then, after incomputable years, he was no longer man but a man-like beast, roving in forests of giant fern and calamite, or building an uncouth nest in the boughs of mighty cycads.

Through eons of anterior sensation, of crude lust and hunger, of aboriginal terror and madness, there was someone—or something—that went ever backward in time. Death became birth, and birth was death. In a slow vision of reverse change, the earth appeared to melt away, to slough off the hulls, and

mountains of its latter strata. Always the sun grew larger and hotter above the fuming swamps that teemed with a crasser life, with a more fulsome vegetation. And the thing that had been Paul Tregardis, that had been Zon Mezzamalech, was a part of all the monstrous devolution. It flew with the claw-tipped wings of a pterodactyl, it swam in tepid seas with the vast, winding bulk of an ichthyosaurus, it bellowed unceasingly with the armored throat of some forgotten behemoth to the huge moon that burned through Lassic mists.

At length, after eons of immemorial brutthood, it became one of the lost serpent-men who reared their cities of black gneiss and fought their venomous wars in the world's first continent. It walked undulously in ante-human streets, in strange crooked vaults; it peered at primeval stars from high, Babelian towers, it bowed with hissing litanies to great serpent-idols. Through years and ages of the opulidian era it returned, and was a thing that crawled in the ooze, that had not yet learned to think and dream and build. And the time came when there was no longer a continent, but only a vast, chaotic marsh, a sea of slime, without limit or horizon, that seethed with a blind writhing of amorphous vapors.

There, in the gray beginning of Earth, the formless mass that was Ubbo-Sathla reposed amid the slime and the vapors. Headless, without organs or members, it sloughed from its oozy sides, in a slow, ceaseless wave, the amebic forms that were the archetypes of earthly life. Horrible it was, if there had been ought to apprehend the horror; and loathsome, if there had been any to feel loathing. About it, prone or tilted in the mire, there lay the mighty tablets of star-quarried stone that were writ with the inconceivable wisdom of the premundane gods.

And there, to the goal of a forgotten search, was drawn the thing that had been—or would sometime be—Paul Tregardis and Zon Mezzamalech. Becoming a shapeless cfit of the prime, it crawled sluggishly and obtrusively across the fallen tablets of the gods, and fought and ravened blindly with the other spawn of Ubbo-Sathla.

Of Zon Mezzamalech and his vanishing, there is no mention anywhere, save the brief passage in *The Book of Erbon*. Concerning Paul Tregardis, who also disappeared, there was a curt notice in several London papers. No one seems to have known anything about him: he is gone as if he had never been; and the crystal, presumably, is gone too. At least, no one has found it.

# Kazam Collects

by C. M. Kornbluth

*For a brief period C. M. Kornbluth had enjoyed a quick climb into the top ranks of fantasy writers for some surprisingly fresh writing under a number of pen-names. This was in the days and in the pages of the new "upstart" science-fiction pulps of the immediate pre-war period. When C. M. Kornbluth came out of the army, other problems diverted him from continuing his writing and it has not been until the last half year that his name has once again thrust into front ranks of fantasy writers. The following story is from his early period. It sparkles with those qualities of stolid, staccato narration which make Kornbluth's work, new or old, always stand out.*

"H

AIL, JEWEL in the lotus," half whispered the stringy, brown person. His eyes were shut in holy ecstasy, his mouth pursed as though he were tasting the sweetest fruit that ever grew.

"Hail, jewel in the lotus," mumbled back a hundred voices in a confused backwash of sound. The stringy, brown person turned and faced his congregation. He folded his hands.

"Children of Hagar," he intoned. His voice was smooth as old ivory, had a mellow sheen about it.

"Children of Hagar, you who have found delight and peace in the bosom of the Elemental, the Eternal, the Un-knowingness that is without bounds, make Peace with me." You could tell by his very voice that the words were capitalized.

"Let our Word," intoned the stringy, brown person, "be spread. Let our Will be brought about. Let us destroy, let us mould, let us build. Speak low and make your spirits white as Hagar's beard." With a reverent gesture he held before them two handfuls of an unattached beard that hung from the altar.

"Children of Hagar, unite your Wills into One." The congregation knelt as he gestured at them, gestured as one would at a puppy one was training to play dead.

The meeting hall—or rather, temple—of the Cult of Hagar was on the third floor of a little building on East 59th Street, otherwise almost wholly unused. The hall had been fitted out to suit the sometimes peculiar requirements of the unguessable Will-Mind-Urge of Hagar Inscrutable; that meant

that there was gilded wood everywhere there could be, and strips of scarlet cloth hanging from the ceiling in circles of five. There was, you see, a Sanctified Ineffability about the unequal lengths of the cloth strips.

The faces of the congregation were varying studies in rapture. As the stringy, brown person tinkled a bell they rose and blinked absently at him as he waved a benediction and vanished behind a door covered with chunks of gilded wood.

The congregation began to buzz quietly.

"Well?" demanded one of another. "What did you think of it?"

"I dunno. Who's *he*, anyway?" A respectful gesture at the door covered with gilded wood.

"Kazam's his name. They say he hasn't touched food since he saw the Ineluctable Modality."

"What's *that*?"

Pitying smile. "You couldn't understand it just yet. Wait till you've come around a few more times. Then maybe you'll be able to read *his* book—'The Unravelling.' After that you can tackle the 'Isha Kazhunk' that he found in the Siberian ice. It opened the way to the Ineluctable Modality, but it's pretty deep stuff—even for me."

They filed from the hall buzzing quietly, dropping coins into a bowl that stood casually by the exit. Above the bowl hung from the ceiling strips of red cloth in a circle of five. The bowl, of course, was covered with chunks of gilded wood.

Beyond the door the stringy, brown man was having a little trouble. Detective Fitzgerald would not be convinced.

"In the first place," said the detective, "you aren't licensed to collect charities. In the second place this whole thing looks like fraud and escheatment. In the third place this building isn't a dwelling and you'll have to move that cot out of here." He gestured disdainfully at an army collapsible that stood by the battered rolltop desk. Detective Fitzgerald was a big, florid man who dressed with exquisite neatness.

"I am sorry," said the stringy, brown man. "What must I do?"

"Let's begin at the beginning. The Constitution guarantees freedom of worship, but I don't know if they meant something like this. Are you a citizen?"

"No. Here are my registration papers." The stringy, brown man took them from a cheap, new wallet.

"Born in Persia. Name's Joseph Kazam. Occupation, scholar. How do you make that out?"

"It's a good word," said Joseph Kazam with a hopeless little gesture. "Are you going to send me away—deport me?"

"I don't know," said the detective thoughtfully. "If you register your religion at City Hall before we get any more complaints, it'll be all right."

"Ah," breathed Kazam. "Complaints?"

Fitzgerald looked at him quizzically. "We got one from a man named Rooney," he said. "Do you know him?"

"Yes. Runi Sarif is his real name. He has hounded me out of Norway, Ireland and Canada—wherever I try to reestablish the Cult of Hagar."

Fitzgerald looked away. "I suppose," he said matter-of-factly, "you have lots of secret enemies plotting against you."

Kazam surprised him with a burst of rich laughter. "I have been investigated too often," grinned the Persian, "not to recognize that one. You think I'm mad."

"No," mumbled the detective, crestfallen. "I just wanted to find out. Anybody running a nut cult's automatically reserved a place in Bellevue."

"Forget it, sir. I spit on the Cult of Hagar. It is my livelihood, but I know better than any man that it is a mockery. Do you know what our highest mystery is? The Ineluctable Modality." Kazam sneered.

"That's Joyce," said Fitzgerald with a grin. "You have a sense of humor, Mr. Kazam. That's a rare thing in the religious."

"Please," said Joseph Kazam. "Don't call me that. I am not worthy—the noble, sincere men who work for their various faiths are my envy. I have seen too much to be one of them."

"Go on," said Fitzgerald, leaning forward. He read books, this detective, and dearly loved an abstract discussion.

The Persian hesitated. "I," he said at length, "am an occult engineer. I am a man who can make the hidden forces work."

"Like staring a leprechaun in the eye till he finds you a pot of gold?" suggested the detective with a chuckle.

"One manifestation," said Kazam calmly. "Only one."

"Look," said Fitzgerald. "They still have that room in Bellevue. Don't say that in public—stick to the Ineluctable Modality if you know what's good for you."

"Tut," said the Persian regretfully. "He's working on you."

The detective looked around the room. "Meaning who?" he demanded.

"Rumi Sarif. He's trying to reach your mind and turn you against me."

"Bulony," said Fitzgerald coarsely. "You get yourself registered as a religion in twenty-four hours, then find yourself a place to live. I'll hold off any charges of fraud for a while. Just watch your step." He jammed a natty Homburg down over his sandy hair and strode pugnaciously from the office.

Joseph Kazam sighed. Obviously the detective had been disappointed.

That night, in his bachelor's flat, Fitzgerald tossed and turned uneasily on his modern bed. Being blessed with a sound digestion able to cope even with a steady diet of chain-restaurant food and the soundest of consciences, the detective was agitated profoundly by his wakefulness.

Being, like all bachelors, a cautious man, he hesitated to dose himself with the veronal he kept for occasions like this, lew and lar between though they were. Finally, as he heard the locals pass one by one on the El a few blocks away and then heard the first express of the morning, with its higher pitched bickering of wheels and quicker vibration against the track, he stumbled from bed and walked dazedly into his bathroom, fumbled open the medicine chest.

Only when he had the bottle and had shaken two pills into his hand did he think to turn on the light. He pulled the cord and dropped the pills in horror. They weren't the veronal at all but an old prescription which he had thriftily kept till they might be of use again.

Two would have been a fatal overdose. Shakily Fitzgerald filled a glass of water and drank it down, spilling about a third on his pajamas. He replaced the pills and threw away the entire bottle. You never know when a thing like that might happen again, he thought—too late to mend.

Now thoroughly sure that he needed the sedative, he swallowed a dose. By the time he had replaced the bottle he could scarcely find his way back to the bed, so sleepy was he.

He dreamed then. Detective Fitzgerald was standing on a plain, a white plain, that was very hot. His feet were bare. In the middle distance was a stone tower above which circled winged skulls—bat-winged skulls, whose rattling and flapping he could plainly hear.

From the plain—he realized then that it was a desert of fine, white sand—spouted up little funnels or vortices of fog in a circle around him. He began to run very slowly, much slower than he wanted to. He thought he was running away from the tower and the vortices, but somehow they continued to stay in his field of vision. No matter where he swerved the tower was always in front and the little twisters around him. The circle was growing smaller around him, and he redoubled his efforts to escape.

Finally he tried flying, leaping into the air. Though he drifted for yards at a time, slowly and easily, he could not land where he wanted to. From the air the vortices looked like petals of a flower, and when he came drifting down to the desert he would land in the very center of the strange blossom.

Again he ran, the circle of foggy cones following still, the tower still before him. He felt with his bare feet something tinglingly clammy. The circle had contracted to the point of coalescence, had gripped his two feet like a trap.

He shot into the air and headed straight for the tower. The creaking, flapping noise of the bat-winged skulls was very much louder now. He cast his eyes to the side and was just able to see the tips of his own black, flapping membranes.

As though regular nightmares—always the same, yet increasingly repulsive to the detective—were not enough woe for one man to bear, he was troubled with a sudden, appalling sharpness of hearing. This was strange, for Fitzgerald had always been a little deaf in one ear.

The noises he heard were distressing things, things like the ticking of a wristwatch two floors beneath his flat, the gurgle of water in sewers as he walked the streets, humming of underground telephone wires. Headquarters was a bedlam with its stentorian breathing, the machine-gun fire of a telephone being dialed, the howitzer crash of a cigarette case snapping shut.

He had his bedroom soundproofed and tried to bear it. The inches of fibre-board helped a little; he found that he could focus his attention on a book and practically exclude from his mind the regular swish of air in his bronchial tubes, the thudding at his wrists and temples, the slushing noise of food passing through his transverse colon.

Fitzgerald did not go mad for he was a man with ideals. He believed in clean government and total extirpation of what he fondly believed was a criminal class which could be detected by the ear lobes and other distinguishing physical characteristics.



He did not go to a doctor because he knew that the word would get back to headquarters that Fitzgerald heard things and would probably begin to see things pretty soon and that it wasn't good policy to have a man like that on the force.

The detective read up on the later Freudians, trying to interpret the recurrent dream. The book said that it meant he had been secretly in love with a third cousin on his mother's side and that he was ashamed of it now and wanted to die, but that he was afraid of heavenly judgment. He knew that wasn't so; his mother had had no relations and detective Fitzgerald wasn't afraid of anything under the sun.

After two weeks of increasing horror he was walking around like a corpse, moving by instinct and wearily doing his best to dodge the accidents that seemed to trail him. It was then that he was assigned to check on the Cult of Hagar. The records showed that they had registered at City Hall, but records don't show everything.

He walked in on the cult during a service and dully noted that its members were more prosperous in appearance than they had been, and that there were more women present. Joseph Kazam was going through precisely the same ritual that the detective had last seen.

When the last bill had fallen into the pot covered with gilded wood and the last dowager had left Kazam emerged and greeted the detective.

"Fitzgerald," he said, "you damned fool, why didn't you come to me in the first place?"

"For what?" asked the detective, loosening the waxed cotton plugs in his ears.

The stringy, brown man chuckled. "Your friend Rooney's been at work on you. You hear things. You can't sleep and when you do—"

"That's plenty," interjected Fitzgerald. "Can you help me out of this mess I'm in?"

"Nothing to it. Nothing at all. Come into the office."

Dully the detective followed, wondering if the cot had been removed.

The ritual that Kazam performed was simple in the extreme, but a little revolting. The mucky aspects of it Fitzgerald completely excused when he suddenly realized that he no longer heard his own blood pumping through his veins, and that the asthmatic wheeze of the janitor in the basement was now private to the janitor again.

"How does it feel?" asked Kazam concernedly.

"Magnificent," breathed the detective, throwing away his cotton plugs. "Too wonderful for words."

"I'm sorry about what I had to do," said the other man, "but that was to get your attention principally. The real cure was mental projection." He then dismissed the bedevilment of Fitzgerald with an airy wave of the hand. "Look at this," he said.

"My God!" breathed the detective. "Is it real?"

Joseph Kazam was holding out an enormous diamond cut into a thousand glittering facets that shattered the light from his desk-lamp into a glorious blaze of color.

"This," said the stringy, brown man, "is the Charity Diamond."

"You mean," spluttered the detective, "you got it from—"

"The very woman," said Kazam hastily. "And of her own free will. I have a receipt. For the sum of one dollar in payment for the Charity Diamond. Signed, Mrs.—"

"Yes," said the detective. "Happy days for the Sons of Hagar. Is this what you've been waiting for?"

"This," said Kazam curiously turning the stone in his hand, "is what I've been hunting over all the world for years. And only by starting a nut cult could I get it. Thank God it's legal."

"What are you going to do now?" asked the detective.

"Use the diamond for a little trip. You will want to come along, I think. You'll have a chance to meet your Mr. Rooney."

"Lead on," said Fitzgerald. "After the past two weeks I can stand anything."

"Very well," Kazam turned out the desk lamp.

"It glows," whispered Fitzgerald. He was referring to the diamond, over whose surface was passing an eerie blue light, like the invisible flame of anthracite.

"I'd like you to pray for success, Mr. Fitzgerald," said Kazam. The detective began silently to go over his brief stock of prayers. He was barely conscious of the fact that the other man was mumbling to himself and caressing the diamond with long, wiry fingers.

The slune of the stone grew brighter yet; strangely, though, it did not pick out any of the details of the room.

Then Kazam let out an ear-splitting howl. Fitzgerald winced, closing his eyes for just a moment. When he opened them he began to curse in real earnest.

"You damned rotter!" he cried. "Taking me here—"

The Persian looked at him coldly and snapped: "Easy, man! This is real—look around you!"

The detective looked around and saw that the tower of stone was rather far in the distance, farther than in his dreams, usually. He stooped and picked up a handful of the fine white desert sand, let it run through his fingers.

"How did you get us here?" he asked hoarsely.

"Same way I cured you of Runi Sarif's curse. The diamond has rare powers to draw the attention. Ask any jewel-thief. This one, being enormously expensive, is so completely engrossing that unsuspected powers of concentration are relieved. That, combined with my own sound knowledge of a particular traditional branch of psychology, was enough to break the walls down which held us pent to East 59th Street."

The detective was beginning to laugh, loudly and hysterically. "I come to you hag-ridden, you first cure me and then plunge me twice as deep into Hell, Kazam! What's the good of it?"

"This isn't Hell," said the Persian matter-of-factly. "It isn't Hell, but it isn't Heaven either. Sit down and let me explain." Obediently Fitzgerald squatted

on the sand. He noticed that Kazam cast an apprehensive glance at the horizon before beginning.

"I was born in Persia," said Kazam, "but I am not Persian by blood, religion or culture. My life began in a little mountain village where I soon saw that I was treated not as the other children were. My slightest wish could command the elders of the village and if I gave an order it would be carried out.

"The reasons for all this were explained to me on my thirteenth birthday by an old man—a very old man whose beard reached to his knees. He said that he had in him only a small part of the blood of Kaidar, but that I was almost full of it, that there was little human blood in me.

"I cried and screamed and said that I didn't want to be Kaidar, that I just wanted to be a person. I ran away from the village after another year, before they began to teach me their twisted, ritualistic versions of occult principles. It was this flight which saved me from the usual fate of the Kaidar; had I stayed I would have become a celebrated miracle man, known for all of two hundred miles or so, curing the sick and cursing the well. My highest flight would be to create a new Islamic faction—number three hundred and eighty-two, I suppose.

"Instead I knocked around the world. And Lord, got knocked around too. Tramp steamers, maritime strike in Frisco, the Bela Kun regime in Hungary—I wound up in North Africa when I was about thirty years old.

"I was broke, as broke as any person could be and stay alive. A Scotswoman picked me up, hired me, taught me mathematics. I plunged into it, algebra, conics, analytics, calculus, relativity. Before I was done, I'd worked out wave-mechanics three years before that Frenchman had even begun to think about it.

"When I showed her the set of differential equations for the carbon molecule, all solved, she damned me for an unnatural monster and threw me out. But she'd given me the beginnings of mental discipline, and done it many thousands of times better than they could have in that Persian village. I began to realize what I was.

"It was then that I drifted into the nut cult business. I found out that all you need for capital is a stock of capitalized abstract qualities, like All-Knowingness, Will-Mind-Urge, Planetude and Excitation. With that to work on I can make my living almost anywhere on the globe.

"I met Rumi Sarif, who was running an older-established sect, the Pan-European Astral Confederation of Healers. He was a Hindu from the Punjab plains in the North of India. Lord, what a mind he had! He worked me over quietly for three months before I realized what was up.

"Then there was a little interview with him. He began with the complicated salute of the Astral Confederation and got down to business. 'Brother Kazam,' he said, 'I wish to show you an ancient sacred book I have just discovered.' I laughed, of course. By that time I'd already discovered seven ancient books by myself, all ready-translated into the language of the country I would be working at the time. The 'Isba Kazhlunk' was the most successful;

that's the one I found preserved in the hide of a mammoth in a Siberian glacier.

"Rumi looked sour. 'Brother Kazam,' said he, 'do not scoff. Does the word *Kaidar* mean anything to you?' I played dumb and asked whether it was something out of the third chapter of the Lost Lore of Atlantis, but I remembered ever so faintly that I had been called that once.

"'A Kaidar,' said Rumi, 'is an atavism to an older, stronger people who once visited this plane and left their seed. They can be detected by—' He squinted at me sharply—'by a natural aptitude for occult pursuits. They carry in their minds learning undreamable by mortals. Now, Brother Kazam, if we could only find a Kaidar . . .'

"'Don't carry yourself away,' I said. 'What good would that be to us?'

"Silently he produced what I'll swear was actually an ancient sacred book. And I wouldn't be surprised if he'd just discovered it, moreover. It was the psalter of a small, very ancient sect of Edomites who had migrated beyond the Euphrates and died out. When I'd got around the rock-Hebrew it was written in I was very greatly impressed. They had some noble religious poems, one simply blistering exorcism and anathema, a lot of tedious genealogy in verse form. And they had a didactic poem on the Kaidar, based on one who had turned up in their tribe.

"They had treated him horribly—chained him to a cave wall and used him for a sort of male Sybil. They found out that the best way to get him to prophesy was to show him a diamond. Then, one sad day, they let him touch it. Blam! He vanished, taking two of the rabbis with him. The rabbis came back later; appeared in broad daylight raving about visions of Paradise they had seen.

"I quite forgot about the whole affair. At that time I was obsessed with the idea that I would become the Rocketteller of occultism—get disciples, train them carefully and spread my cult. If Mohammed could do it, why not I? To this day I don't know the answer.

"While I was occupying myself with grandiose daydreams, Rumi was busily picking over my mind. To a natural cunning and a fantastic ability to concentrate he added what I unconsciously knew, finally achieving adequate control of many factors.

"Then he stole a diamond, I don't know where, and vanished. One presumes he wanted to have that Paradise that the rabbis told of for his very own. Since then he has been trying to destroy me, sending out messages, dominating other minds on the Earthly plane—if you will excuse the jargon—to that end. He reached you, Fitzgerald, through a letter he got someone else to write and post, then when you were located and itemized he could work on you directly.

"You failed him, and he, fearing I would use you, tried to destroy you by heightening your sense of hearing and sending you visions nightly of this plane. It would destroy any common man; we are very fortunate that you are extraordinarily tough in your psychological fibre.

"Since then I have been dodging Rumi Sarif, trying to get a diamond big enough to send me here through all the barriers he has prepared against my

coming. You helped me very greatly." Again Kazam cast an apprehensive look at the horizon.

The detective looked around slowly. "Is this a paradise?" he asked. "If so I've been seriously misled by my Sunday School teachers." He tried weakly to smile.

"That is one of the things I don't understand—yet," said the Persian. "And this is another unpleasantness which approaches."

Fitzgerald stared in horror at the little quills of fog which were upending themselves from the sand. He had the ghostly, futile dream sensation again.

"Don't try to get away from them," snapped Kazam. "Walk at the things." He strode directly and pugnaciously at one of the little puffs, and it gave way before him and they were out of the circle.

"That was easy," said the detective weakly.

Suddenly before them loomed the stone tower. The winged skulls were nowhere to be seen.

Sheer into the sky reared the shaft, solid and horribly hewn from grey granite, rough finished on the outside. The top was shingled to a shallow cone, and embrasures were black slots in the wall.

Then, Fitzgerald never knew how, they were inside the tower, in the great round room at its top. The winged skulls were perched on little straggling legs along a golden rail. Aside from the flat blackness of their wings all was crimson and gold in that room. There was a sickly feeling of decay and corruption about it, a thing that sickened the detective.

Hectic blotches of purple marked the tapestries that hung that circular wall, blotches that seemed like the high spots in rotten meat. The tapestries themselves the detective could not look at again after one glance. The thing he saw, sprawling over a horde of men and women, drooling flame on them, a naked figure still between its jaws, colossal, slimy paws on a little heap of human beings, was not a pretty sight.

Light came from flambeaux in the wall, and the torches cast a sickly, reddish-orange light over the scene. Thin curls of smoke from the sockets indicated an incense.

And lastly there was to be seen a sort of divan, heaped with cushions in fantastic shapes. Reclining easily on them was the most grotesque, abominable figure Fitzgerald had ever seen. It was a man, had been once. But incredible incontinence had made the creature gross and bloated with what must have been four hundred pounds of fat. Fat swelled out the cummerbund that spanned the enormous belly, fat welked out the cheeks so that the ears of the creature could not be seen beneath the embroidered turban, gouty of fat rolled in a blubbery mass about the neck like the wattles of a dead cockerel.

"Ah," hissed Joseph Kazam. "Runi Sarif . . ." He drew from his shirt a little sword or big knife from whose triangular blade glinted the light of the flambeaux.

The suety monster quivered as though maggots were beneath his skin. In a voice that was like the sound a butcher makes when he tears the fat belly from a hog's carcass, Runi Sarif said: "Go—go back. Go back—where you

came from—" There was no beginning or ending to the speech. It came out between short, grunting gasps for breath.

Kazam advanced, running a thumb down the knife-blade. The monster on the divan lifted a hand that was like a bunch of sausages. The nails were a full half-inch below the level of the skin. Afterwards Fitzgerald assured himself that the hand was the most repellent aspect of the entire affair.

With creaking, flapping wingstrokes the skulls launched themselves at the Persian, their jaws clinking stonily. Kazam and the detective were in the middle of a cloud of flying jaws that were going for their throats.

Insanely Fitzgerald beat at the things, his eyes shut. When he looked they were lying on the floor. He was surprised to see that there were just four of them. He would have sworn to a dozen at least. And they all four bore the same skillfully delivered slash mark of Kazam's knife.

There was a low, choking noise from the monster on the divan. As the detective stared Kazam stepped up the first of the three shallow steps leading to it.

What followed detective Fitzgerald could never disentangle. The lights went out, yet he could plainly see. He saw that the monstrous Rumi Sarif had turned into a creature such as he had seen on the tapestry, and he saw that so had Kazam, save that the thing which was the Persian carried in one paw a blade.

They were no longer in the tower room, it seemed, nor were they on the white desert below. They were hovering in a roaring squalling tumult, in a confusion of spheres which gently collided and caromed off each other without noise.

As the detective watched, the Rumi monster changed into one of the spheres, and so, promptly did Kazam. On the side of the Kazam sphere was the image of the knife. Tearing at a furious rate through the jostling confusion and blackness Fitzgerald followed, and he never knew how.

The Kazam sphere caught the other and spun dizzily around it, with a screaming noise which rose higher and higher. As it passed the top threshold of hearing, both spheres softened and spread into black, crawling clouds. Suspended in the middle of one was the knife.

The other cloud knotted itself into a furious, tight lump and charged the one which carried the blade. It hurtled into and through it, unpaling itself.

Fitzgerald shook his head dizzily. They were in the tower room, and Rumi Sarif lay on the divan with a cut throat. The Persian had dropped the knife, and was staring with grim satisfaction at the bleeding figure.

"Where were we?" stammered the detective. "Where—?" At the look in Kazam's eyes he broke off and did not ask again.

The Persian said: "He stole my rights. It is fitting that I should recover them, even thus. In our plane—there is no room for two in contest."

Jovially he clapped the detective on the shoulder. "I'll send you back now. From this moment I shall be a card in your Bureau of Missing Persons. Tell whatever you wish—it won't be believed."

"It was supposed to be a paradise," said the detective.

"It is," said Kazam. "Look."

They were no longer in the tower, but on a mossy bank above a river whose water ran a gamut of pastels, changing hues without end. It tinkled out something like a Mozart sonata and was fragrant with a score of scents.

The detective looked at one of the flowers on the bank. It was swaying of itself and talking quietly in a very small voice, like a child.

"They aren't clever," said Kazam, "but they're lovely."

Fitzgerald drew in his breath sharply as a flight of butterfly things passed above. "Send me away," he gasped. "Send me away now or I'll never be able to go. I'd kill you to stay here in another minute."

Kazam laughed. "Folly," he said. "Just as the dreary world of sand and a tower that—a certain unhappy person—created was his and him so this paradise is me and mine. My bones are its rock, my flesh is its earth, my blood is its waters, my mind is its living things."

As an unimaginably glowing drift of crystalline, chiming creatures loped across the whispering grass of the bank Kazam waved one hand in a gesture of farewell.

Fitzgerald felt himself receding with incredible velocity, and for a brief moment saw an entire panorama of the world that was Kazam. Three suns were rising from three points of the horizon, and their slanting rays lit a paradise whose only inglorious speck was a stringy, brown man on a riverbank. Then the man vanished as though he had been absorbed into the ground.

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